

RED REVENGE



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RED REVENGE

A ROMANCE OF CAWNPORE

BY

CHARLES E. PEARCE

AUTHOR OF

"THE AMAZING DUCHESS," "THE BELOVED PRINCESS,"
"LOVE BESIEGED: A ROMANCE OF LUCKNOW," "THE
BUNGALOW UNDER THE LAKE," ETC. ETC.

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INTRODUCTION

CAWNPORE occupies an unique position in the history of the Indian Mutiny. It supplies the only instance where personal hatred and personal revenge actuated the instigators of the tragedy. It presents the solitary example of a definite plan of procedure arranged by recognised leaders. The outbreaks at Meerut, at Delhi, at Lucknow, and other places, were without purpose or policy. At Cawnpore all was coldly and carefully thought out beforehand. Whether the final horror was contemplated may be doubted, but when it was decided upon, it was carried out with fiendish determination and completeness. Nana Sahib, and his lieutenant Azimoolah Khan, found a ready and willing instrument at hand in a woman, and the official inquiry subsequently held showed beyond question that to Hooseinee Khanum, the servant of the Nana's favourite dancing-girl, belongs the infamy of the House of Massacre.

It may seem to some that the story of Cawnpore is one too painful to revive, and if the remembrance meant the horrors alone I should be disposed to agree. But Cawnpore signifies far more than a mere recital of horrors. It stands for all that is noble, heroic, and enduring in the men and women of Great Britain; and as a monumental example of dauntless courage, devotion, and self-sacrifice it cannot be excelled in the world's history.

"Red Revenge" is an attempt to picture the progress of events in Cawnpore leading up to the occupation of Sir Hugh Wheeler's ill-fated entrenchment, and its terrible sequel. I have not sought to heighten the effect by dwelling on the feeling of detestation with which, during the Mutiny,

the sepoys were regarded in England. The exceptional ferocity exhibited at Cawnpore was at the moment held to be evidence of innate savagery and lust for blood, justifying the repulsive reprisals of Neill. Time has modified this view. It is a question whether the cause of that ferocity is not to be attributed to some form of dementia, such as found its outlet in France under the Reign of Terror. Throughout the Mutiny the contagion of the mania for bloodshed, and the highly strung condition of those who were drawn within the influence of that mania, were especially noticeable. The nerves of the East Indian are not to be judged by those of the Anglo-Saxon. The Mutiny was started by one man, Mungul Pandy, who ran amok; the subsequent breaking away of regiments of "Pandies" was but a process of the same kind. In a great measure this was the case at Cawnpore, but with a difference. The Nana and Azimoolah knew how to take advantage of the weakness of their countrymen, and they utilised it for their own merciless schemes. Herein lies the dramatic element in the story of Cawnpore.

The intertwining of fiction with fact is generally attended by the subordination of one to the other. Contrary to the usual rule, I have thought it advisable to give the leading place to fact. In the case of Cawnpore it was difficult to do otherwise. The bare narrative is so full of detail, so exciting in its various situations, so swift in its action, and its catastrophe so colossal, that it naturally overshadows individual interests. Of a necessity, Mowbray Thomson, Shepherd, and Trevelyan have been largely drawn upon in so far as the occupation of the entrenchment and its siege are concerned; what happened after the destruction of the boats, and the return of the doomed women to Cawnpore, is derived from the evidence of natives given at the official inquiry.

CHARLES E. PEARCE.

RED REVENGE

CHAPTER I

AFTER A "HEAVY" NIGHT WITH THE NANA

A LAMP was burning dimly in the sitting-room of the bungalow. The smoky light did little more than show indistinctly the outlines of the bare, clumsy table in the centre, the half-dozen chairs, all of different shapes and more or less rickety, an ugly, comfortless couch, a long cane chair of native manufacture, and a nondescript cabinet or cupboard, some three feet high, on the top of which were tumblers, a bottle of brandy, and sundry bottles of pale ale.

Pictures cut from the *Illustrated London News* decorated the walls, and in the place of honour over the spindle-legged writing-table at the side hung a framed water-colour portrait of a lady, whose hair in side curls, dominated by a high comb at the back, and whose dress with its leg-of-mutton sleeves and broad lace collar unmistakably denoted the very early Victorian fashions. On the spindle-legged table were newspapers by the last post from England, a few books, writing materials, and a bundle of

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official-looking documents. A rifle and pig-sticking spear were in the angle formed by the table and the wall.

The night was not a time of continuous silence—it hardly ever is in India. The irritating whirr of innumerable insects, the hoarse barks of distant pariah dogs, strange sounds of laughter from a group of grass-cutters squatting round a fire cooking chupatties, or wheaten cakes, were only a few of the noises that broke the stillness.

Then came a sound much more pronounced and definite—the tramp of horses' feet. The sahib of the bungalow attended by his servant had come home. The sahib, Lieutenant Dick Heron, swung his leg over the saddle and dropped to the ground, not with his usual springy alertness, but with the air of a man who was dead beat. He stood for a few seconds motionless, his arm resting on his horse's neck, then straightening himself he mumbled an order in Hindustani to the sleek, dark-skinned soldier behind him, and walked with a somewhat unsteady gait towards the bungalow, dazzlingly white in the cold moon rays.

"In for a 'head' to-morrow, by Jove," he groaned, a little shiver, the foretaste of trial and tribulation, passing over him. "I'm not seasoned to this kind of fun yet, like the Major, Captain Cardross, Walker, Kendrick, and the rest, and I don't know that I want to be seasoned. It means a leather liver, I guess. Anyhow, if you've got to see life, see it and forget the business as soon as possible."

Lieutenant Heron was in a penitent mood—not an uncommon sequitur to a "heavy" night; and the function at the Nana's palace at Bithoor had been unusually heavy. He advanced in a somewhat zigzag fashion towards the bungalow.

Dick Heron, slim, pallid—a little more so than usual, thanks to the Nana's champagne, brandy, and full-flavoured cheroots—was very much in looks what ladies nowadays would call "a nice boy." He had come straight from Addiscombe to India, and before he had been six months in the country influence bestowed a lieutenancy upon him. He was gaining a little experience of native ways and customs under the guidance of Seereek Dhoondoo Punth, better known as Nana Sahib, whose professions of friendship for the English officers at the Cawnpore station were never-ending. Outside the Nana's profuse hospitality and his own regimental duties Dick Heron knew very little. At present he saw everything through the spectacles of Anglo-Indian routine and tradition, and if he thought of anything at all it was that he was having a good time. He had, in fact, like all "griffins,"—as newly arrived unfledged English officers were then called—"gone the pace."

Dick stumbled up the steps leading to the verandah which ran round three sides of the squat one-storeyed building, and in the doorway leading to his rooms fell over an inanimate huddled-up object, at which he did his best to swear in Hindustani. The effort, however, was too great, and he relapsed into English. The object, his chokadar or watchman, grovelled at

the Sahib's feet in Eastern fashion, mumbled abject apologies to "my lord," and crawled away to sleep in a less inconvenient place than a passage.

Meanwhile "his lordship" stumbled into the sitting-room. The light had attracted myriads of winged creatures; the air was like a hot blast. It was the dry season, and every one was praying for the speedy arrival of the monsoon. Two white bundles, disturbed by the Sahib's noisy entrance, unfolded themselves into human beings. One glided hurriedly to his place at the punkah to escape his lordship's wrath, and began working the clumsy apparatus vigorously. The other, with many salaams, busied himself in assisting the Sahib to undress.

A door on the right opened into the bedroom. In the middle of the room was a bedstead, its legs standing in pans of water to check the invasion of undesirable creeping things, the upper part enclosed by mosquito curtains. On the mattress was a rush mat, pillow, and light coverlet. Dick Heron was too drowsy and fatigued to do much more than growl at his servant; and, clad in shirt and pyjamas of Delhi silk, he threw himself helplessly on his bed and dropped almost immediately into a heavy sleep to the accompaniment of the creaking punkah.

He had been dead to the world but five minutes when he awoke, bathed in perspiration, gasping for breath, his mouth and throat dry as the parched earth outside. He thought he had been asleep five hours. The brilliant moonrays

stealing into the room through the khuss tatties, or grass mats at the windows, he mistook for the break of day. He expected every moment to hear the hated sound of gunfire announcing that another day of monotony had begun, and reminding him that in half an hour he must present himself on the parade ground.

He lay quietly for a couple of minutes trying to endure his splitting headache, and inwardly cursing his bearer for not bringing him the customary cup of tea, when he became conscious of two things, firstly, that the silvery light which cast such inky shadows could hardly indicate the misty yellow dawn, and secondly, that the punkah was motionless. No wonder the close, heavy air was insufferable.

In a burst of irritation he started up, seized his slippers (kept on the bed to prevent appropriation by giant ants or maybe a snake), thrust in his feet, switched back the mosquito curtains, and flung at the punkah-wallah his stock of opprobrious Hindustani epithets, finishing by hurling a boot in the direction of the slumberer. The admonition was effectual. The punkah resumed its creaking and swinging, but in a fashion too energetic to last; Dick filled a tumbler with water from a porous earthenware pitcher, hoping to cool his burning throat.

"Pooh—beastly tepid stuff," he growled, and once more rolled on to his bed.

Sleep was impossible. He tossed from side to side. His brain was simmering. A dozen grotesque pictures chased each other across the retina struggling for mastery. Gorgeous colours,

brilliant lights, the flash of jewels were mingled in chaotic confusion ; a subtle perfume, sweet, yet pungent, haunted him, and with it came the vision of a woman with the smile of a Delilah in her eyes of midnight, her lips parted alluringly ; her small even teeth crimson with betel nut. She was waving her long, round, snake-like arms with slow, graceful motions ; every muscle of her sinuous body appeared to keep time with the monotonous tap-tap, the drone, and the soft twanging of native instruments. Each movement, each gesture of the slim serpentine form had its meaning—and the meaning lingered in the senses of the lad. Adala, the dancing-girl, whose slightest whim was law at the Palace of Bithoor, had much to do with spoiling the rest of the young subaltern, fresh to the fascination, the mystery of India, and the practised, insidious arts of her women.

Another figure hovered in the background of Dick Heron's mental picture—a man, gross and unwieldy in form ; his face sallow, sleek, inane, slightly pock-marked ; his eyes expressionless and singularly set, suggesting those of a puppet ; his clean shaven chin and head denoting the Mahratta. This was Seereek Dhoondoo Punth, Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the dead Bajee Rao, the Peishwa of Poonah, and the last monarch of the Mahratta dynasty in Central India, deposed by us in the forties and exiled to his palace at Bithoor to live luxuriously on the eighty thousand a year assigned to him. Round and round within Dick's fevered brain went this picture, like a squirrel in a cage, gradually becoming

dimmer until he dropped into unconsciousness out of sheer exhaustion.

He was aroused by his khitmutgar with tea, and his head splitting fit to burst, he struggled back into life, the repulsive duty of the morning inspection on the hot, dusty parade-ground uppermost in his mind. He staggered sleepily into his bath-room, a little low-walled enclosure, paved with rough brick; a jar of cold water dashed over his seething body somewhat restored him; he struggled into his regimentals with the assistance of his servant, and managed to put in an appearance on the parade ground in time to escape a wiggling from the colonel.

Then came the inspection of arms and accoutrements—a part of his daily duty he had grown to loathe. He hated the long rows of dusky faces more than ever this morning. He thought the sepoys looked very ridiculous in their ill-cut, ill-fitting, English uniforms. Perhaps the sepoys thought so too, for every morning directly they were dismissed, they rushed to their huts, discarded the incongruous garments, and put on their native dress.

Dick Heron was in a bad temper, and to his disturbed vision everything seemed out of gear. He grumbled at his men, his irritation increased by a kind of supercilious insolence which he fancied he noticed in their demeanour. He wound up by nagging at the havildar, or native sergeant, before his men, and with the perversity and arrogance of youth went on heedless of the flash of anger that leaped to the man's eyes and was reflected in those of the rank and file.

At last, somewhere about eight o'clock the welcome signal for dismissal was heard, and Dick strolled back to his bungalow for breakfast, a second toilet, and an hour's study of the language of the natives with his teacher. To be able to write the letters "P.H.," passed in Hindustani, after his name was a stepping-stone to promotion. About noon he sauntered into the breakfast club for a chat with his comrades, and possibly to linger over tiffin if he could summon sufficient appetite.

Half a dozen men were lolling in bamboo chairs in the verandah, smoking and sipping the inevitable brandy pawnee. They greeted Dick Heron with grins and uproarious applause. He looked at them in amazement, and drew himself up a little stiffly. One young fellow, Captain Howard Kendrick, whom Dick had known at Addiscombe, rose and with an air of mock deference pointed to the chair he had just vacated.

"Don't be an ass, Kendrick," growled Dick. "Perhaps you'll kindly explain why you're all bent upon making yourselves idiots this morning."

"My dear fellow, we're only desirous of showing our sense of your superiority," said Kendrick, bowing and waving his hand towards the empty chair.

"Superiority in what—common sense?"

"Anything but that, dear boy—anything but that! What do you say, gentlemen?"

A roar of laughter was the response. Dick was angrier than ever.

"Set of jays," he muttered, under his breath.

Kendrick was distinguished at Addiscombe for his cool impudence and his fertile imagination. Just now he was bent upon displaying both.

"We want to compliment you, old chap, on your conquest. By Jove, I've seen nothing like it since I've been stationed here, and I've had a year's experience of this detestable spot. Your love-making was superb."

"My love-making?" faltered Dick.

Howard Kendrick nodded gravely. The others, taking their cue from the imaginative young captain, nodded in much the same fashion. Dick Heron was beginning to feel goaded beyond endurance.

"What Kendrick wants to tell you—only he's such a confounded long time about it—is that you went at a devil of a pace last night at the Nana's dinner-party and——"

"Please don't interrupt, Dalrymple," said Kendrick loftily. "I've sat on too many court-martials not to know how to conduct an inquiry. Don't you recollect, Dick, how when that dusky witch Adala made eyes at you and finished up her fetching performance by kneeling at your feet, that you insisted upon her sitting by your side? By Gad, and she did it, too, and in a jiffy your arm went round her waist. You should have seen the Nana's codfish eyes flare up. It was a risky thing to do. The Maharah's spent a fortune on his pet dancing-girl. Those heavy bangles on the artful jade's arms are worth more than a sub's pay for a twelve-month."

"I don't remember anything of the kind," stammered Dick. "I couldn't have been such a fool."

"Why not? Those girls can twist any man they want round their fingers. They've been at the game for hundreds of years. The women of Paris can't teach them anything they don't know in that way. I only hope you haven't made the Nana jealous. Not that it would matter very much—he's too lazy and good-natured to bother about such a trifle. Besides, he's awfully fond of the English. Look at the presents some of our fellows have had from him, and I dare say if you cut him out he won't mind very much. He's only to send to Cashmere and get half a dozen girls as handsome as Adala, though not, I grant you, so bewitching."

"Stop your silly chaff, Kendrick," exclaimed Dick, now really angry. "I'll leave you to make to the others the apology you owe me for those fairy tales of yours. I'm off to the billiard-room. I'm drawn to play Jack Hurst in the subs' handicap."

He turned brusquely away, but had not gone half a dozen paces before he heard hasty steps behind him, and a hand descended on his shoulder. Howard Kendrick had followed him.

"I haven't really riled you, have I, Dick?" said he.

"I don't know about being riled. I can only say it was beastly bad form to say what you did before the other fellows. I saw Sam Chaffins taking it all in. He's the busybody of the regiment, as you know well enough. He's certain to

make the most of it, and if it reaches the ears of Colonel Waring——"

"And Ruth Armitage?" put in Kendrick in his drawling way.

"And Ruth Armitage if you like," rejoined Dick fiercely. "Anyhow, it's bound to do me no good."

"My dear Dick, you take things too seriously. It's nothing for a fellow to have a fancy for a dancing-girl."

"Well, I haven't. I'd like to run straight. I've no money to fool away, and as soon as I get my P.H. I want to get an appointment away from the army and settle down."

"That's the ambition of all of us, so we needn't discuss it. I'd like to make it clear about Adala. There really wasn't so much exaggeration in what I said as you seem to imagine. You dipped pretty deeply into the Nana's champagne, and you've forgotten a good deal."

Dick Heron made no reply. He knew it was so, but he felt sure he had not behaved so stupidly as Kendrick would have him believe.

"If you like, I'll tell you exactly what happened," went on Kendrick.

"You needn't trouble," said Dick coldly.

"My memory's good enough, thank you."

He wheeled round abruptly, and entered the billiard-room. He was glad to get away from Kendrick. There was something in the latter's manner which jarred on his nerves. It was almost as though he wanted to force a quarrel upon him.

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL WITH THE MADONNA FACE

THE billiard-room was insufferably hot. Two limp cadets were struggling through a languid game. Dick Heron's match was not to come off until the evening, and he had no object in coming to the billiard-room other than to escape from the embarrassing chaff of Kendrick and the rest.

Three men were talking in low voices at the end of the room. One of these was Jack Hurst. Dick approached the group, and Hurst catching sight of him disengaged himself from his friends.

"I'm glad you've looked in. I wanted to see you," said Hurst hurriedly. "We shall have to postpone our match to-night. I'm off to Benares on special service."

Jack Hurst was on Sir Hugh Wheeler's staff, and one could hardly say there was anything strange in this sudden mission. But the look of seriousness on Hurst's good-humoured countenance struck Dick Heron with a sense of uneasiness.

"Anything wrong?" said he.

"No—that is, it's as well to look into things."

The other men of the group were arguing, and raised their voices.

"I tell you, Standridge, your fears are all moonshine," said one, Captain Rippon of the 2nd Light Cavalry, a native regiment of horse

stationed at Cawnpore. "I've passed twenty years in India, and I'd trust my men anywhere. They're absolutely loyal. There's not a sowar who wouldn't lay down his life for me."

"Glad you think so, Rippon. I'm not so sure. This Barrackpore business has a very ugly look."

"I know—I know; but General Hearsey nipped the thing in the bud. We shall hear no more of it," broke in Rippon impatiently.

"But the greased cartridge grievance——"

"Oh, damn the greased cartridges. A great deal too much has been made of the wretched affair. All we have to do is to be firm and the thing will die away."

"You may find it easy to be firm with your men, Rippon, but you're an exception. The trouble is that the sepoys no longer regard our 'firmness.' The infantry do as they like. They're openly indifferent, and things which in Madras or Bombay would be punished are passed over in Bengal. I was on the parade ground this morning, and could not help seeing the sneers on the faces of the men when a youngster of a subaltern was wiggling a havildar of twice his age."

Dick Heron jerked his head over his shoulder towards the speaker. Without a doubt he himself was the "youngster" referred to.

"Whether the havildar had or had not committed any offence, and whether the lieutenant was right or wrong isn't the point," went on Deputy-Commissioner Standridge. "What I contend is that the majority of sepoys haven't the same respect for their officers they had years ago. They've been spoiled, pampered, allowed to

have their own way—and if a crisis ever comes it's very doubtful if we can rely upon them."

"You're an alarmist, Standridge. You see things with the eye of a civilian. You don't mix among the men as we do. You don't know their attachment to us and their loyalty to the Company."

The voices dropped, and Dick Heron no longer heard distinctly. That which had reached him, however, excited his curiosity, and increased his vague uneasiness.

"What's this Barrackpore affair?" he asked Hurst abruptly.

"Nothing of very great importance; but there's no harm in your knowing so long as you keep your knowledge to yourself. I'll swear the news has long since reached the rank and file and is buzzed about in their bazaars, of course more or less exaggerated. Those bazaars are hotbeds of lies and intrigue, and it would be all the better for English rule in India if they could be stamped out."

Hurst was talking nonsense, and he knew it. He might as well have demanded the stamping out of the religions of the natives as the stamping out of their bazaars. At Cawnpore the military bazaars were numerous, and their reputation was very bad. Each regiment had its own bazaar; and the *goojurs*—otherwise highway robbers; *budmash*—as the *riffraff* are called; *dacoits*, and even *Thugs* mingled freely with the dealers in necessities and dainties. Not less than 40,000 persons out of the 50,000 which constituted the population of Cawnpore—the majority of them beggars, thieves and worse—congregated in these dens.

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"The business that takes me to Benares concerns the Barrackpore outbreak," said Hurst. "General Wheeler's anxious to know what Spottiswood, who's in command there, thinks. He may have some more information than we possess. The facts, so far as they've reached us, are these. About six weeks ago the 19th Bengal Native Infantry at Berhampore refused to obey orders; the regiment was disarmed and marched down to Barrackpore, a hundred miles or so away, and there disbanded. Apparently this was the end of the affair, but it wasn't so. Soon after the men were at Barrackpore a fellow named Mungul Pandey, of the 34th, ran amok in front of the lines, yelling 'Come out, you blackguards! The Europeans are upon us! From biting these cartridges we shall become infidels! Get ready! Turn out, all of you!'"

"By Jove," cried Heron excitedly, "I hope the rascal was shot down."

"It was the other way about. He shot and wounded the adjutant and sergeant-major, who tried to secure him. The Colonel came on the scene, but rather muffed the business. The men began to be excited, took no notice of his orders, and things were looking ugly when General Hearsey rode on to the ground and ordered the guard to secure the fellow. Hearsey's son went with them, pistol in hand, and Mungul Pandey caved in—shot himself. He's in the hospital, and I guess when he's well enough he'll be hanged. Seven companies of the 34th were disbanded, and that's the story—whether it's going to be continued in our next I'd rather not say."

"What do you think?" asked Dick. "Do you side with Captain Rippon or with Standridge?"

"I'll tell you when I come back from Benares. If the niggers really think their religion is going to be attacked by the compulsory use of those confounded greased cartridges, we shall find it out at Benares, the Hindoos' holy city. Good-bye, old chap. I haven't any time to spare."

Hurst hurried away. Dick would have questioned Captain Rippon and Standridge, but both were gone, and having no interest in the two languid "griffins" at the billiard table, Dick sauntered out, avoiding Kendrick and his set purposely. He could hear their voices in the mess-room, accompanied by the popping of soda-water corks, and in the penitent silence of the moment he was in no mind to join them either in talking or drinking.

The club-house was on the west side of the Ganges canal running south from the river. To the east were the native cantonments, extending some six miles along the bank of the Ganges. Dick strolled towards the English church, which, with its white tower in the midst of a cluster of trees, is about the most conspicuous object in Cawnpore. Converted into a purely military station by the East India Company, Cawnpore has no ancient temples and palaces like Delhi and Lucknow. It is and was distinguished for nothing but its manufactories of saddles and other leather goods.

Jack Hurst's sinister piece of news had obliterated the impression of Kendrick's unpalatable badinage, and with the possibility of native disturbances there came into Dick Heron's

mind the picture of a girl who was beginning to be regarded as the belle of the station, greatly to the dissatisfaction of the reigning beauties.

Ruth Armitage, the daughter of Colonel Waring's comrade, Captain Armitage, killed at the siege of Mooltan nine years before, and the Colonel's ward, had always been very "nice" to Lieutenant Dick Heron. They were much of an age, and there was a further link between them in the discovery they had made, that they had acquaintances in the same circle in London, though the two had never met in England, where Ruth, according to custom, had been sent to be educated. Indeed, Ruth had met Philip Heron, Dick's elder and only brother, just after he returned from the Crimea, and Dick's eyes sparkled when the girl spoke enthusiastically of the handsome dashing hussar, and of the share he had had in the memorable Balaclava charge. Ruth had stayed a short time with Amy, Dick's sister, and so it came about that not long after their introduction they began to feel that they were old friends.

Dick sauntered along the Chandun Choke, or "Street of Silver," as the main highway of Cawnpore is called, pursuing the train of thought set in motion by Standridge's words.

"It would be awful if . . . what nonsense. It's ridiculous to think of rebellion in India, in spite of Standridge's croakings—it was like his dashed impudence to criticise me and the wiggling I gave my havildar this morning. What the deuce does a deputy-commissioner know about military matters? The officers who mix with

the men every day of their lives are, as Rippon says, likely to be the best judges. I admit I was a little 'rusty' with Kulloo Bux, but as for the sneers—Standridge imagined he saw them. The sepoys are all right; if mischief happens it will come from the budmash. The gaols are crowded with the scum."

Dick was half tempted to loiter among the native shops and try to ascertain the views of the proprietors on the vexed question of the cartridges, about which ugly rumours had spread that hog's fat had been used in the manufacture, but he recollected Captain Rippon's warning, that too much fuss had already been made about the business, and he decided that he might do more harm than good by talking, especially as his stock of Hindustani was limited, and he was likely to misunderstand anything that might be said.

So he sauntered along the Delhi road in the direction of his quarters, noting all the signs of the solidity and permanence of the British rule, in the theatre, the assembly rooms, the stores of the English merchants, the club-houses, and in the distance the compounds of the officers and the officials of the Anglo-Indian Civil Service, where fruit and vegetables, European as well as native varieties, grew in profusion and without much labour in their culture.

There were not many English to be seen in the streets, but this was nothing. It was the hottest part of the day, and those who could do so kept within the shade and coolness of their bungalows. All was placid; the usual air of indolence prevailed.

Dick reached his bungalow, strove to whet his appetite with a curry, went to sleep for a couple of hours, awoke not very much refreshed, had a bath, and finally dressed himself in the orthodox white linen jacket, highly starched, ditto trousers, and cummerbund. Then he ordered his buggy and set out to kill time till dinner at the mess.

Dick's penitent mood still lingered. The dregs of the mad time at the Nana's palace the previous night had not subsided. He would like to chase his black thoughts away by allowing them to dwell on something that was pure and innocent. He had a reluctance in facing Ruth Armitage in his present state of mind; but what influence was like hers? Yes, he would call on Colonel Waring, or rather on Mrs. Waring; he was justified in so doing even as a matter of form, seeing that it was the hour when the officers' wives received their friends.

As Dick Heron neared Colonel Waring's bungalow, he saw a buggy driving away in the opposite direction. The dazzling sun, and the hot air quivering as though it had come from the mouth of a furnace distorted the vision, and Dick could not distinctly see the occupant of the vehicle.

"Who is that, Hazaree Lall?" he asked his servant.

"Sahib Kendrick," was the reply.

Dick pinched his lips. He was conscious of an odd pang of annoyance. It was very absurd, for Kendrick surely had a perfect right to call on Mrs. Waring and Ruth Armitage.

Dick descended from his buggy and walked through the compound, gay with the gorgeous

flowers of the East, to the verandah, beneath the canopy of which half a dozen white-turbaned dusky figures were squatting. One rose, salaamed, and took in Dick's name. The prattle and laughter of women could be heard from within, mingled with the strains of Thalberg's "Home, sweet home." Dick Heron loathed the piece. He had heard Miss Cummings, the "crack" pianist of Cawnpore, struggle with its serpentine wanderings times out of number.

The servant ushered him in, and soon he was in Mrs. Waring's drawing-room, threading the maze of spindle-legged tables, loaded with curios, and making his way towards a group of ladies in muslin dresses, ample in skirt and flounced almost up to the waist.

Mrs. Waring, a tall, fragile-looking, willowy woman, with the languid, faded air of the middle-aged Anglo-Indian lady, shook hands with the young man, and inclined her swan-like neck condescendingly and coldly, Dick thought. As a rule she was very gracious and smiling. To-day her smile was decidedly acid. One of the ladies standing by her looked at Dick inquiringly, and evidently with approval. Unless Mrs. Waring wished to be rude she could hardly avoid introducing him. She did so, and the lady froze instantly. Dick was perfectly conscious of her changed demeanour, and stood somewhat mystified and embarrassed. An interchange of a few commonplaces, and he was left to amuse himself with the photographic albums which were then indispensable for the entertainment of one's guests.

Photographs did not interest him in the least ;

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his eyes were roaming in search of the girl he had come to see. She was not there; no doubt she was one of the audience listening to Miss Cummings's pounding, twiddling, and her rocket-like scales. For the moment Dick was evidently a person of no importance, and he had no difficulty about slipping away in search of his divinity.

Once more he threaded the maze of furniture and knick-knacks, and was about to cross the passage to the music-room when a girl, slim and graceful as a fawn, suddenly emerged from the doorway on the other side. She was rather below the middle height; perfectly proportioned, the soft gauzy Indian muslin clinging to her shoulders and arms accentuating their curves. Her dark chestnut hair was arranged in smooth shining bands each side of her forehead, coming down rather low, but not so low as to conceal the small well-shaped ears. The fashion suited her regular features and gave her a Madonna-like aspect, the more attractive because of its modesty.

Directly she saw Dick Heron she stopped, and would have withdrawn into the room behind her, but for his crossing the passage in a couple of strides, holding out both hands. He could be demonstrative now without remark; the Hindoo servants did not count.

"Ruth!" he exclaimed.

If Mrs. Waring was cold, Ruth Armitage was colder. She did not appear to notice his outstretched hand, and she remained within the draped doorway to which she had retreated.

"I did not expect to see you, Mr. Heron," she faltered.

"Mr. Heron"; and until that afternoon it had always been Dick!

"You did not expect," he repeated, almost as agitated as the girl. "Why not?"

"Please don't ask me. There's no need. Surely you must know."

Her embarrassment was slowly giving place to anger. The even, creamy tint of her complexion was heightened by the spot of crimson blazing in her cheeks. Dick Heron's nerves were unstrung. The slightest thing going awry just then was sufficient for him to lose his control. Ruth's manner, her words, stung him to the quick.

"I don't know," he returned curtly, "or I shouldn't have asked. But it's very clear I'm not welcome, so I wish you good evening, Miss Armitage."

He bowed stiffly and turned. He never saw the sudden quiver of the finely cut lips, the remorseful, yearning look in the eyes, the fading of the crimson in the cheeks. He stalked away, cool outwardly, but inwardly thrilling with passion.

"I said I didn't know," he muttered, "nor do I, but I'm not such an ass that I can't guess what's amiss. Something's got wind about that stupid business of last night. Kendrick's at the bottom of it, the cad! He was a sneak at Addiscombe, and once a sneak, always a sneak. I'll have it out with him, by Heaven I will! He must have been spreading his lies this afternoon. He took jolly good care to clear out before I showed up."

CHAPTER III

A MESSAGE FROM THE DANCING-GIRL

DICK HERON was not master of himself. Everything that day had been a cause of irritation. The intensely dry heat, the suffocating air, had affected his nerves, and at the moment he was at war with the world. He jumped into his buggy, hardly giving his servant time to mount, and drove furiously to head-quarters. He burned to come face to face with Kendrick, but before doing anything he must have a "peg."

Arrived at head-quarters, he threw the reins to his servant and hastened to the smoking-room. He had made up his mind that if Kendrick were there he would tackle him on the spot. But no Kendrick could be seen, and Dick had his "peg" of brandy, and then another and another. There was, he found, not much chance of meeting Howard Kendrick until perhaps late at night. Kendrick, so he was told, had gone a journey of some five miles to look at a horse he thought of buying, and would most likely dine with the vendor.

Dick's inquiries naturally led the conversation in the direction of Kendrick, and two or three men were not sorry to discuss him freely. They had

reason to do so, for Kendrick had not paid the bets he had lost over the last races.

"How did he use you, Heron?" asked one man.

"I had nothing on with him," said Dick shortly. "He already owed me money, and I didn't care to give him the chance of increasing the debt. It isn't money matters I want to see him about."

Dick flung himself into a long cane chair, lit a cheroot and gloomily smoked. The others went on gossiping; and from their gossip it was pretty clear that the general opinion was that Kendrick had not of late been running straight.

Although Dick Heron and Kendrick were at Addiscombe at the same time, they were not much together. They were in different "sets," and Kendrick left a year before Heron. He was generally spoken of as "that Kendrick," which would seem to imply he was not held in high favour; but Dick knew nothing definitely against him, and when they met at Cawnpore, Dick Heron, a stranger, was glad enough to fraternise with some one with whom he could compare notes about old Addiscombe times.

The mess dinner was not served until seven, and in the meantime Dick, having steadied his nerves with the assistance of "pegs," discovered that he had pretty well forgotten his troubles and took his share in the frivolous talk that followed.

When the talk languished, some one proposed "fly loo," as a diversion for the final half hour before dinner, and Dick made one in the pastime—probably the simplest form of gambling known

to man. All that one had to do was to sit with a little heap of sugar on the table before you and wait patiently until a fly chose to settle on the dainty. You were at liberty to bet what you liked, within a limit, on your chance, and you either received the stakes all round, or paid according to whether the fly preferred your heap or that of one of your neighbours.

Dick lost half a sovereign at this excitement before dinner was announced, and having cheerfully paid up, sauntered with the others into the mess-room. He had gone through this routine until he was sick of it; but there was nothing else to be done, and so far as he knew, nothing else ever would be done.

The chatter during dinner was of the orthodox aimless kind—the chances of promotion, the probabilities of the next horse race, the billiard handicap, the latest scandal. Apparently, in the general aspect of things there was nothing different to-night from any other night, but somehow everybody was conscious that the gaiety was feverish and artificial. The decanter was passed round with more than customary frequency, the voices were louder, the stories more of the barrack-room class than usual. Suddenly came in a stentorian voice the words:

“I tell all of you fellows straight, that the niggers mean to drive us into the ‘black water,’ if they once get the chance. You’re as blind as bats—the whole lot of you. *I* know, and you don’t.”

The voice was that of Captain Tom Ingram, who had spent half his life in India, who knew

almost as much about the natives as the natives themselves, yet had never advanced in rank beyond his captaincy. He was a splendid soldier, but no disciplinarian, as discipline was understood by the orthodox, and he was far too blunt and outspoken to please his superiors. Moreover, he had a leaning towards "pegs." Maybe this tendency stood in the way of his advancement.

Ingram's words fell like a bombshell. The frivolity was checked, a curious silence followed.

The man to whom Ingram was talking, Major Parry—an honest fellow enough, but narrow-minded and inclined to be "goody-goody;" he never missed going to church every Sunday, and believed in the possibility of Christianising the whole of India—murmured something about the "beneficence of the English rule," and the efforts of the missionaries.

"Christianity is all-powerful. I can't think the native army would turn against their friends," said he. "Once let this unfortunate matter of the greased cartridges——"

"For Heaven's sake, Parry, don't talk rot," burst out Ingram, springing to his feet. "I'm sick of the cartridge business. It's only the outward and visible sign of what's been simmering unsuspected for years. Listen to me. I was in Lucknow five years ago, in the time of Shah Wazid Ali, the last king of Oudh. He'd a notion of reorganising his army, but that didn't suit the British Resident, who was curious to know his game. He hadn't any game. He was simply hungering for something to do. 'Oh,'

said the Resident, 'if you think you're not safe you'd better employ British troops.' Well—but I'm boring you. What's the good of my talking?"

Ingram flopped into his seat and filled his glass with an unsteady hand, bestowing a liberal quantity on the table. There was a chorus of "Go on—go on." Ingram had unconsciously brought to the surface the undercurrent of thought which had been surging beneath the frivolity. Ingram might be addicted to "pegs" and "brandy pawnees," but when he chose to speak earnestly, he knew what he was talking about.

"Oh, it's 'go on,' is it?" said he, once more rising, clutching the edge of the table and swaying slightly. "All right. The continuation of the story is that Shah Wazid finding himself snubbed, chucked up soldiering for nautch girls, and went the pace. Practically, the king took a back seat, and Rajah Dursham Sing came along. This nabob had three sons—Buktour Sing, Durshin Sing, and Cholawka Sing. The king let them do just what they damn please, and they did it with a vengeance. Durshin Sing was a horse leech to the backbone, and grabbed every inch of land in Fyzabad he could lay hold of. But he went further. There was a mosque near Fyzabad which he annexed with other property; and his sons, strict Brahmins, refused to allow the 'Arjan'—that's the call to prayer, you know—to be sounded from the mosque. Pass the decanter, Parry."

Talking always made Tom Ingram dry. He

refreshed himself. Meanwhile Dick Heron sat with glistening eyes fixed on the stalwart captain. The wine Dick had drunk, following the brandy, had set his nerves quivering. Ruth's anger, and his suspicions that Kendrick had slandered him were still rankling. He was ready to pick a quarrel with anybody. He felt intensely vainglorious, and was quite prepared to stand up against the world for the invincibility of England. Ingram's opening words had irritated him, and he was burning to interrupt.

"Now, then, see what sprang out of this piece of oppression," continued Ingram. "A travelling Moulvie came along, and, knowing nothing of Durshin Sing's orders, went into the mosque to say his prayers after the fashion of his kind, and sounded the 'Arjan.' The fat was in the fire at once; the Brahmins gave the Moulvie a thrashing; off went the Moulvie to the king for redress; one thing led to another; there was a jolly shindy between the Brahmins and Mahomedans, with the upshot we were called in to adjust matters. Of course, we did it in our usual fashion, and put an end to the row by deposing the king of Oudh and collaring his kingdom."

"And why shouldn't we?" shouted Dick furiously—he had got the opening he had been waiting for. "Aren't the niggers much better off under our rule than under their own?"

Dick's tone was aggressive, and a look of apprehension was apparent in the faces of some of the men. Dick's nearest neighbour gripped the young lieutenant's arm and told him to "shut

up." Ingram could be very quarrelsome when he liked, and when he was quarrelsome he was dangerous. To everybody's surprise, however, he remained perfectly unmoved by the outburst. Indeed, he regarded Dick's eager, boyish face somewhat pityingly.

"You're a youngster," he returned, "and you only repeat like a parrot what you've heard. You'd better let me finish. Oudh became ours last year, and what happened? Why, thousands of men who had been in the King's service were thrown out of employment. They had never done anything in their lives but fight, and finding themselves stranded they've gone to swell the swarms of budmash (riffraff), who are only waiting for the signal to plunder. I don't care what you fellows think; I only say that if I were a native of Oudh, I should consider the annexation a gross piece of injustice, and I should rebel against it."

Dick sprang up in spite of the efforts of his neighbour to restrain him.

"You've no right to say such things, Captain Ingram. It's as good as treason," he cried, "to talk like that in the hearing of those niggers."

Dick pointed to two khitmutgars, or waiters, who were moving noiselessly at the end of the room apparently indifferent to everything but their duties.

"Oh, you're right," said Ingram with a shrug of the shoulders, and subduing his voice slightly.

"It sounds like treason; at the same time, it's common sense. Bundle those fellows out, and you chaps draw closer. Now that I'm on

this business I'd better finish it. It's no good living in a fool's paradise."

There was something strangely serious in Ingram's voice and manner, and the men around the table obeyed him; most of them conscious of a sudden disquieting sensation of insecurity. There was not one there who did not know that the safety, nay, that the lives, of the few thousand English men and women in India depended entirely on the fidelity of the native troops. Ingram went on:

"You all know that the 19th and 34th were stationed at Lucknow, but what you don't know is that directly Oudh passed into our hands there were signs that something had gone wrong with both regiments. No one knew exactly what it was; the fellows were too cunning to show their hands, you bet. Anyhow, when the annual change of troops came about at the beginning of this year, and the 19th were sent to Berhampore, and the 34th to Barrackpore, the authorities at Lucknow were jolly glad to get rid of them, and hoped by sending them away and separating them that the mischief was stopped. They're wrong. It's only just beginning. You'll see."

Ingram's forebodings were listened to with incredulity. His comrades expected something much worse. What was the insubordination of two regiments worth in the face of the staunchness of the great body of native troops? It was not strange that the 19th and 34th, fresh from Lucknow, with her new masters and smarting under the loss of her king, should be disaffected,

but the matter was not likely to go further. Nearly every man present was of one opinion on this point. Ingram was unanimously voted to be a prophet of evil, and the younger officers were the loudest in expressing their condemnation of his rash speculations.

The talk became excited, the fiery sherry and the sweet champagne went round, men shouted one against the other, and the only silent one of the company was Tom Ingram himself. He sat smoking a big cheroot, apparently indifferent to what was going on. He'd said all he cared to say, and that was enough for him.

The air was insufferable, and the monotonous din of voices had probably had a soporific effect on the punkah wallahs, for the ventilating apparatus moved but languidly. Dick and two or three of his chums went for coolness outside the bungalow.

There was no moon, but the pale sky was spangled with stars, and to Dick's excited fancy the scene was tinged with romance. His senses were exalted. A good deal of nonsense had been talked during the last hour about the wonderful deeds of Clive, Cornwallis, Wellesley, Baird, and the rest who had led the English troops to victory in the early days of the conquest of India; and what with brandy and sherry and champagne, he felt warlike and reckless. He longed for adventure. It can hardly be said he had forgotten either Ruth Armitage or Howard Kendrick, but when he thought of them it was with the sense of having been slighted, and he was eager to show both that he was not the boy they apparently thought he was.

The men he was with were typical young Englishmen of the period ; they could only talk shop and scandal. Dick was in the mood for neither.

"I'm off," said he, abruptly.

"Aren't you staying for vingt-et-un ? We shall have a round presently," said one.

"No, thanks. I'm going for a quiet stroll. Shall turn in early. I'm done up. It was a bit thick last night."

"At the Nana's ? Yes, I heard about it. Jolly lucky beggar you were to have an invite. I say, what are his dancing-girls like ? I'm told the one called Adala is a ripping beauty. Did you see her ? "

"I suppose I did. I don't know," returned Dick shortly.

He wheeled round, said good night, and strode away muttering, "I wish Lambert hadn't reminded me of Adala. I'd like to forget her."

So prudence told him, but he found it difficult in his present state of mind to check his thoughts. He hurried along, hoping exercise would quiet his nerves. He was nearing the main street when he felt his arm lightly touched. He turned, on his guard instantly, for Cawnpore swarmed with miscreants who would as lief murder as rob. He saw a tall woman, veiled in native fashion, close to him.

"Sahib, sahib," she whispered rapidly. "Fortune smiles upon you. I am the bearer of good news. I have been waiting. If I had not seen you to-night I should have come to-morrow ; and if I was not lucky to-morrow, the next night, and the next."

"What are you talking about? Who are you?" demanded Dick.

"You don't remember me. I am Hooseinee Khanum, Adala's hand-maiden. I saw you last night at Bithoor."

She shifted her veil slightly, and he recognised her face. The features were very regular and not unpleasing, save as to the mouth. The lips were very full, clearly cut, and sphinx-like in their entire absence of expression. They were like those of the Hindoo god Siva, as he is pictured, implacable, relentless, blood-thirsty.

"Well, what is it?" asked Dick hesitatingly.

"Adala wants you," she returned, her lips parting with a swift motion, showing her red, betel-stained teeth. "You must come. She sends you this token. You must never part with it."

She held out a blood-red ruby set in gold and attached to a fine gold chain. Dick took the trinket wonderingly. She went on to whisper insinuatingly that Adala had something of the utmost importance to say to him, and that it must be said as soon as possible, that night preferably.

"A carriage is at hand," said she. "I can take the Sahib to Adala in half an hour."

It was not late, scarcely ten o'clock. The promise of an adventure, the sense of mystery, the charm and fascination of Adala herself—all were attractive, especially so in the mood in which he then was. But he hesitated.

"What does Adala want to tell me?" he asked.

"How should Hooseinee know? She is but a lowly servant. She is not worthy to be entrusted with Adala's secrets."

Dick Heron could not be but conscious of the subtle influence of this woman. The liquid voice, the large mystic eyes, the supple body, swathed in the picturesque one garment which the Eastern woman winds about her so deftly and artistically, the faint perfume, sweet yet pungent, she exhaled, formed a combination of allurements difficult to withstand. Even the mouth and the scarlet teeth, repulsive and suggestive of savagery when regarded separately, had their influence in accentuating and imparting piquancy to her charms.

"Come," she breathed softly; and the light of devilry danced in her eyes as she beckoned him. There was temptation in the curves of her arm, in the jingle of her bangles.

He capitulated—not in words, but in obeying her summons to follow her. She covered her face and silently took her way to a road leading in the direction of the Ganges Canal. Here a carriage, which Dick knew belonged to Nana Sahib—the Maharajah affected everything English, and he had had this carriage made in London—was in waiting.

Hooseinee Khanum gathered up her drapery, shrank into her corner of the carriage, and sat, a veiled, mysterious figure, motionless as a statue. She was perfectly silent, and Dick construed her silence to mean that having fulfilled her mission she had no further interest in him. Dick did not attempt to disturb the stillness; he allowed

his mind to dwell on mystery and romance, and his thoughts were not unpleasant, for whatever might be the end of the adventure, up to the present it was gratifying to his vanity.

The carriage was of light construction ; it was drawn by a couple of powerful horses, which the driver put to the top of their speed. Hooseinee Khanum talked about taking him to their destination in half an hour, the half hour soon passed, and still the horses were tearing along the dusty road. Dick was not surprised. If he were being conveyed to the Nana's palace at Bithoor he knew the journey could not be done in half an hour.

The time went by quickly ; Dick was conscious of a strange feeling of lethargy not altogether unpleasant, of an indifference to everything, even to the risks he was running, not only to his personal safety, but to his reputation if the escapade became known. Some such thoughts had crossed his mind when he first entered the carriage, but he had crushed them, or had allowed them to be crushed by the spell cast about him by Hooseinee Khanum.

CHAPTER IV

HOOSEINEE KHANUM'S SWEETMEATS

THE carriage entered the compound of the Bithoor Palace, and stopped, not at the principal entrance, but at a mean-looking door stuck in the side of the house. Dick and his companion alighted, and on seeing where he had been brought suspicions of treachery flashed across the young soldier's mind.

"I believe you're tricking me, you jade," he exclaimed angrily.

"If you think so, kill me. Here is my dagger!" cried Hooseinee Khanum, flinging back her head in defiance, her hand going swiftly to her girdle. By this time the moon had risen, and its light flashed on the blade. Hooseinee forced its jewelled hilt into his hand.

"I have been told Englishmen are as brave in love as they are fearless in war. Do those who say this lie?" she asked sarcastically. "What enemies have the English within the Nana's palace? Does Adala hate them? See, Sahib, I will walk first, and if there is treachery, bury the knife in my heart. There is no danger but what a coward might imagine."

She marched proudly in front of him to the door. The sting in her words galled him.

"Take your dagger. I don't want it," said he huskily. "Lead on; I'll follow you—to the devil if you like."

She turned, fell at his feet and accepted the dagger humbly.

"You are a brave—you are a warrior, Sahib," she cried. "This entrance is not worthy of your lordship, but do you not understand? It is Adala who wishes to see you—not the Nana."

Hooseinee placed her finger to her lips in token of secrecy, and accompanied the words with a glance of meaning from her glistening eyes. There was, in her look and gesture, temptation combined with danger. Dick might have resisted the first, but the second provoked him to defiance. She saw the battle was won, and rising, disappeared within the dark doorway. Dick followed her.

The passage was straight and narrow, and a hanging lamp enabled Dick to see that he and his companion were alone, but who could say enemies were not awaiting them? In the event of an attack he had but his fists with which to defend himself. It would have been more prudent to have retained possession of the dagger. But it was too late for regrets. Whatever might be the consequences, he must battle through them.

Hooseinee Khanum dragged apart the heavy curtains at the end of the passage; beyond was a kind of lobby with a dome-shaped roof. On the walls were Eastern weapons of ancient date, matchlock guns, swords, broad and narrow

bladed, spears, shields, suits of flexible chain-armour going back to the days of Akbar and Suraja Dowla.

There was no furniture ; only a few mats were on the floor, and the apartment was probably used as a waiting-room for servants. Curtains concealed a narrow deep recess, in reality a doorway, for on the woman touching the spring of the mechanism which locked the door it slid back into a groove in the wall.

The room into which this sliding door opened was spacious, sumptuously decorated, and furnished in Eastern fashion. The hangings, the cushions, the divans were of the finest silk ; the embroideries were of golden thread ; costly rugs covered the floor. Treasures in the way of inlaid cabinets and bric-à-brac were abundant.

The purely Indian surroundings of the apartment surprised Dick, for the most characteristic feature of the Nana's palace—that portion at least where he received his European guests and gave his dinner-parties and entertainments—was its English aspect, or, rather, its affectation of what the Nana imagined an English interior was like, for he had never seen one—not even the imitations dear to the hearts of the wives of the officers and civilians high in authority. The Nana was profuse in his own hospitality, but he could not be induced to accept any in return. None of the English at Cawnpore had ever received the Maharajah under their roofs.

Dick's experience of the Nana's dinner-parties had been very much that of the writer who described his sitting down at what had once been

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the mess table of a cavalry regiment covered with a tablecloth of the finest damask, with the accompaniment of bedroom towels for serviettes. The soup was served in a trifle dish, bought at the sale of an English officer's effects, and ladled into odds and ends of crockery, among which was a broken teacup of the old willow pattern. The incongruities were numberless. Huge silver dishes were mingled with common stoneware plates, bone-handled knives were side by side with silver spoons and forks, there were not two vegetable dishes alike ; pudding was served on a soup-plate, and the guests ate their cheese out of glass dishes. The champagne glasses were richly cut and the tumblers for beer were cheap and clumsy.

All was muddle and untidiness, and it was the more extraordinary because, if rumour spoke the truth, the Nana's treasurer and confidential adviser, Azimoolah Khan, had, during a lengthened stay in London, been received with the greatest favour by titled ladies, and by them petted and pampered and lionised, as was the fashion in the forties and fifties, and he might be expected to advise the Nana on such household points as the English regarded as important.

The contrast between the dirt and slovenliness of the reception-rooms of the Bithoor Palace, and the magnificence and order to be seen in what were evidently the Maharajah's private apartments, impressed itself on Dick's mind, notwithstanding his bewilderment. The moment, however, was not one for speculation. His guide had thrown aside her head covering, and begged

him to seat himself, while she announced his arrival to Adala.

"But first you must eat," said she. "Here are sweetmeats," and she fetched a tray from a side table.

The tendering of sweetmeats, Dick well knew, was a high favour to pay a guest ; for all that he hesitated, though he was aware a refusal would give mortal offence. But if the sweetmeats should chance to be poisoned ? Such "accidents" were not unknown in the annals of Indian crime.

Hooseinee Khanum must have guessed what was in his mind. She broke a sweet in two, ate one piece herself, and handed the other to Dick. She was a Mahomedan ; had she been a Hindoo the laws of her caste would have prohibited such a thing. Dick could not refuse the dainty. He hated the luscious confections the natives delighted in, and he had to force the stuff down his throat.

"I will tell Adala the Sahib has come. It will please her," said the woman, her heavy lips for the first time suggesting a smile.

No sooner was Dick left to himself, than he was conscious of a feeling of languor and lassitude stealing over him. His inclination was to throw himself on one of the soft cushions, and, if not sleep, indulge in roseate waking dreams.

"It's that cursed sweetmeat," he muttered. "I ought not to have touched the stuff. I could but have chanced giving offence. Pah ! I was an ass to listen to that confounded woman. Why did I do it ?"

This was the puzzle. Now that she was gone the magnetic influence that drew him onward was gone too. And Adala? Did he in his heart want to see the dancing-girl? Was she really so beautiful as the night before he imagined she was? He was not so sure. The glamour of romance with which he had invested her was merely due to a clouded brain and overwrought nerves.

"Folly—folly," he exclaimed. "I've simply justified every lie that cad Kendrick told about me. What did I do it for? I'd better clear out while I've got the chance. I shall appear as a fool and a coward in the eyes of the woman here, I suppose, but I can't help that."

He was staggering across the room to the door leading to the lobby, when for the first time his glance fell upon the pictures on the walls. When he entered he was too much impressed by the general aspect of Eastern luxury to notice details. Slowly these details were revealing themselves like the development of a photographic plate.

The picture he first caught sight of made him turn away with a gesture and an exclamation of disgust. All that the foulness of a depraved Oriental imagination could suggest was there depicted. The other pictures were as bad, or worse. He had heard stories of a mysterious den of dark infamy possessed by the Nana, but had looked upon them as idle tales. He knew now that they were true. Shuddering, he hastened to the door. It was locked, but doubtless if he could but find the spring he could open it.

He failed to discover anything. The surface of the door, which was of great solidity, was perfectly smooth. Resolving not to waste any time, he went at once towards one of the windows. Before he reached it, however, he heard Hooseinee Khanum's voice. She moved quicker than he, and the next moment she gripped his arm. Evidently she did not guess his intention, for she said apologetically:

"I cannot find Adala. The Sahib must not be angry with his slave. I am not to blame."

Dick seized upon this as a good reason for escaping from the horrible place, but he thought it policy not to anger the woman. Doubtless she would open the door now that there was no reason why he should remain.

"Of course you're not to blame," said he lightly. "I'll get back to Cawnpore. I suppose you can find me a horse."

"The Sahib is not going?" she cried with sudden vehemence.

"By Jove, but the Sahib is. Open the door, please. Here's the love-token you gave me. I don't want it."

"No; I will not let you go."

Hooseinee Khanum flung her arms about him, as he threw the jewel on the cushions, and clasped her hands behind his back. The woman had changed her costume; she was now but lightly clad, her arms were bare, enabling her to cling to him with a tenacity which almost took his breath away.

"Don't be a fool. What have you to do with me?" he gasped angrily.

"I love you, and you shall not go."

The Siva-like mouth hardened, and the eyes glittered. The glitter might have been that of love, but it was more suggestive of disappointment and balked desire.

"I don't want to hurt you, but if I do you'll only have yourself to blame. By Heaven——"

Directly he tried to release himself, her sinuous grasp tightened, and before he was aware of her intention she had pressed her full lips on his. The contact maddened him. Writhing in her embrace he strove to get free, but in vain. She was like a snake twined about him, and her grip had pinned his arms to his sides. She would have kissed his lips again, but he wrenched his face round, and her mouth touched his cheek.

"Shall I tell you the truth, Sahib Heron?" she breathed rapidly between her kisses. "Adala did not send me. It was I who wanted you—only I, Hooseinee Khanum. But your lordship has no eyes for the lowly handmaiden. Hooseinee Khanum is not beautiful like Adala, but she can love better—far better than the dancing-girl. That was why I lured you here, that is why I will not let you go. My lord—my love—I am your slave. Beat me—kill me, if you like, but do not leave me. I want you to tell me about your wonderful land—about your people—about——"

Her words died away in guttural sounds. Failing to loosen her frenzied grasp by his struggle to free his imprisoned arms, he had by a sudden jerk of his body swung her off the ground. He was possessed by savage determination; he

whirled her once round ; the pressure on his arms relaxed, he was able to use his hands, and he clutched her arms above the elbows and strove to tear himself from her by main force.

He was amazed at her virile strength. But Hooseinee Khanum was no slim weakling of a Hindoo girl, brought up on a vegetable diet. She was a mature Mahomedan woman, with the blood of the old wiry dwellers of the desert in her veins. She was approaching her thirtieth year, and her raven hair was streaked with silver. The force of her embrace was overwhelming, and it was only when in the twisting and twinings her elbow struck with great violence the sharp edge of an ebony cabinet, sending a quiver through her whole body, that her clenched hands gave way, and she dropped on the inlaid floor as though she had been felled by a blow from his fist.

She remained curled in a huddled heap. After the impact there was hardly any movement, and she did not utter the slightest sound. Horrified, the excited lad bent over her, fearing she was dead. He was soon undeceived. Her chest was heaving ; the hands and feet were shivering as though they were icy cold ; her face he could not see, covered as it was by her masses of hair uncoiled in the struggle.

"I hope I haven't hurt you," he panted ; "I couldn't help it if I have. If you're not going to show me how to leave this accursed trap decently by the door, I shall look after myself."

The woman made no reply. Perhaps she was unable to speak, not having recovered from the

shock of her fall ; possibly, too, she was exhausted by the frantic struggle. Dick waited a few seconds. Faint, choking sounds could now be heard. She was recovering.

"Did you hear what I said ? " he went on presently.

Again there was silence, and Dick determined to waste no more time, but carry out his intention of escaping by the window. He dashed across the room, and had his hand on the khuss tatti, when he heard his name called out, not in Hooseinee Khanum's voice, but in deeper tones.

He turned, and saw standing near the door leading to the interior of the Palace, a man whom he knew extremely well—Azimoolah Khan, the Nana's treasurer.

"I hope, Lieutenant Heron, I'm not intruding. I apologise. I was seeking Hooseinee Khanum. I was not aware she had a visitor."

The voice was veiled ; the manner soft and silky. The English language was pronounced with a perfect accent and with the ease of one who had not only mastered its difficulties, but was accustomed to use it. The words were harmless enough, but the tones were sinister.

For a moment or two Dick was taken aback. He did not know how to account for his presence in the Nana's palace. The position was both equivocal and embarrassing. A note of gravity was added by the sight of the prostrate woman. She was alive, but for anything Dick knew she might be seriously injured.

"I'm afraid appearances are against me, Azimoolah," he stammered. "Of course I ought

to explain ; but further than assuring you I was induced to come here under the impression some one in the Palace wished to make some important communication to me, I hardly know what to say."

"There is no need for an explanation," said Azimoolah smoothly. "I presume the Maharajah is not aware of your visit. If his highness knew, he would, I am sure, give orders for a reception more worthy of your exalted rank."

Dick felt the sarcasm, but he dared not resent it. Nor could he say that the person who had sent him the enticing message was Adala, the Nana's favourite dancing-girl. The consequences might be terrible to her. Dick knew well enough that the princes of India, whether of royal birth or adoption—as was the case with Nana Sahib—were swift and fierce to revenge themselves when their jealousy was excited. There was only one thing Dick could do, and that was to throw the responsibility of his presence on Hooseinee Khanum. After all, it was practically the truth. He made the plunge.

"The Maharajah, so far as I am aware, is ignorant that I'm here," said he. "Only Hooseinee Khanum, who brought me, knows. I had reason to think she had deceived me. I desired to leave the palace ; she tried to detain me ; we had an altercation—a struggle—and she fell. I hope she's not hurt."

"It is of no consequence. I regret you have been put to so much inconvenience. You would desire to return to Cawnpore ? Permit me to offer you my services."

He bowed low, his gesture suggesting a mingling of the stiff courtesy of England with the humility and self-depreciation of the East.

"Thank you—but—but I should like to be sure the woman has come to no harm," returned the lad hesitatingly.

Azimoolah shrugged his shoulders, contemptuously inserted the point of his foot beneath Hooseinee Khanum's body and turned her sufficiently to bring her face into view, speaking to her harshly in a language Dick did not understand. It did not sound like Hindustani; most likely it was one of the many dialects in use in Oudh.

Dick could not help thinking that the woman's previous unconsciousness was assumed, for she answered Azimoolah readily enough. Apparently she was justifying herself. The talk did not last long. Hooseinee Khanum slowly rose and stalked haughtily away with an air which suggested she was Azimoolah Khan's equal.

Azimoolah went to the door, opened it, and stood in a deferential attitude. When Dick Heron approached Azimoolah preceded him into the lobby as though to give an assurance that he need fear no foul play.

In the open air Dick's giddiness increased. The reaction had set in after the prolonged excitement. That sweetmeat? Had it contained anything deleterious? He fancied Azimoolah looked at him inquiringly, very much as a doctor does when he is diagnosing the condition of a patient. Whether or not he felt that if he rode home on horseback he would have some difficulty in maintaining his seat in the saddle.

"You would prefer a carriage perhaps?" suggested Azimoolah.

Dick nodded. He was rapidly becoming worse. He could hardly speak. Azimoolah took his arm and walked with him to the corner of the building, in front of which was a verandah. Here a couple of chowkedahs (watchmen) were squatting. Azimoolah sent one man to the stables, and remained with Dick who, almost in a state of collapse, was leaning against the wall, his cheeks as white as the stone.

Ten minutes later Dick Heron was speeding towards Cawnpore, indifferent to all things earthly. Arrived at his bungalow, he was lifted from the carriage by the frightened servants, and placed on his bed looking like death itself. The servants held a consultation. What was everybody's business was nobody's business. They all knew the Sahib was ill, maybe dead; but who was to fetch the doctor?

Somehow the matter was settled, and an hour afterwards a buggy stopped at the bungalow, and a well-set-up, business-like man stepped out—Francis Stainton, one of the regimental doctors.

CHAPTER V

FROM THE GANGES TO THE THAMES

"WHY don't you sit down, Phil? I never saw such a restless fellow as you are. Does your arm pain you?"

"Not at all, Amy. It's getting on famously, thanks to your care and Dr. Langridge's skill."

"Well then, dear, I wish you wouldn't walk about like a caged tiger. You're getting on my nerves. What are you thinking about?"

"Young Dick and his last letter from Cawnpore."

"Oh, you mean the bother among the sepoy he speaks of. I forget what it was about."

"It doesn't matter; I wasn't thinking of that particularly. By the way, didn't that pretty girl, Ruth Armitage, who was staying with you two years ago, when I was invalided home after those terrible six months I passed in the hospital at Varna, go to Cawnpore?" broke off Philip abruptly. "She has an uncle or a guardian there, so you told me."

"Yes, a Colonel Waring; but what makes you mention her? My big brother hasn't fallen in love, has he?" laughed Amy. "I thought you were above such frivolities, Phil."

"I don't know that I'm in love, and if I were,

"I'm not sure it would be frivolity," said Philip Heron slowly.

"Of course it wouldn't. You're frightfully serious in everything, dear old Phil," said his sister, her brown eyes beaming.

"Well, real fighting isn't exactly a light-hearted business, though it's infinitely better than what went with it in the Crimea. I fancy the more than a taste of hardship our fellows had there sobered a good many of them. I know it did me."

"Yes, indeed," cried Amy, with a little shudder. "Thank goodness Dick won't have such a time. At any rate I hope he won't. The boy's so impulsive. He hasn't got your cool head, Phil."

"He's none the worse for being impulsive. Upon my word, if the youngsters saw danger ahead they might hesitate, and then their chance of covering themselves with glory would be lost. As you say, Dick won't have my Crimean luck, but if anything should happen—if there be a rumpus among the native troops, as some writers in the newspapers seem to foreshadow—I'd like to be with him and take my share. I'm tired of this inaction. I want to be at hard work again."

Phil Heron—Captain Heron, late of the 11th Hussars, to give him his full title—resumed pacing the lawn of the pretty garden leading down to the river. His sister watched him a little anxiously from the hammock in which she was idly swinging. Dick, her junior by three years, was her favourite brother. She was fond of Phil, but she was never in his confidence. He

was two years older than she, and this made all the difference in the world. Phil had never poured his troubles into her sympathetic ear as Dick had many a time. Dick was never without a flirtation on hand, even when he was at Addiscombe, and supposed to be working hard, and somehow this weakness made him more interesting in Amy's eyes than was her reserved elder brother, who, as far as she knew, never troubled his head about women.

Phil took soldiering somewhat seriously, as, according to his sister, he did most things, and his bitter experience in the Crimea had not tended to lighten his views. It was rather the other way about. He had ridden in the Balaklava charge; he had been severely wounded, fever seized him in the Varna hospital, and he was given up as a doomed man. But somehow he pulled through and came back to England, declared by the doctors to be unfit for further service. It was a bitter disappointment to him to be told that his career as a soldier was at an end, for he loved his profession and had looked forward to rising to a high rank.

Phil returned from the Crimea in the spring of 1855; it was now the spring of 1857, and, thanks to a superb constitution, constant fresh air, the assiduous care of his sister Amy, and the rest at her pretty cottage at Teddington, he had recovered his health and strength in a marvellous way. He was yearning to get back to the army, but nothing had been done. His doctor was cautious, and for the moment refused to sanction the step.

Captain Heron continued to walk up and down the lawn for some five minutes; then suddenly he stopped in front of the hammock.

"Look here, Amy," he burst out, "I'm not going to do any more loafing. I shall run up to town this afternoon, and see some of the powers that be at the Horse Guards. I've got a friend or two at court, and I ought not to have much difficulty in getting a commission. I'd like to have a shot at India."

"Cawnpore?" said Amy, with a smile.

"Not necessarily," he answered, after a pause—a pause which his sharp-eyed sister interpreted as significant of evasion. "India, you see," he went on, "is the only place where one is likely to see active service. We've always got a little war on somewhere. If it isn't the frontier, chastising what I believe are generally called 'insolent tribes,' it's helping the various Indian races in the interior to settle their quarrels, and so there's always something for one to do."

"Still, it would be pleasant if you could be sent to Cawnpore," continued his sister, bent on teasing him. "You'd have company in Dick, and there'd be—Ruth Armitage."

Phil took Amy's bantering very good-humouredly.

"Ruth, of course, would be an attraction, but please don't forget that my object in going to India is to fight, not to make love."

"Oh, certainly. Ruth is very pretty and very nice: don't you think so?"

"I admit that was the impression I was under during the short time I had the pleasure of her

acquaintance. She only stayed with you a month, I fancy."

"And that was nearly two years ago, just after my wreck of a hero came here to get patched up. Your memory's wonderful, Phil," exclaimed his sister, laughing. "My dear boy, it's no use your pretending you're not interested in Ruth, because you are. Perhaps you'd like to know that she hasn't fulfilled the mission that took her back to Colonel Waring."

"Her mission? What was that?" asked Captain Heron quickly. "She never told me she had one."

The young lady in the hammock burst into an uncontrollable fit of merriment.

"Of course not. It wasn't very likely," she exclaimed, when her mirth had subsided. "Didn't you know that she returned, as scores of girls do who have friends or relatives in India, to find a husband?"

"I don't believe it."

"Why not? She might do worse than marry a rich East India Company's official, especially if he's old."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Amy," returned her brother, in a tone of reproof. "I can't think you mean what you say."

"Well, it doesn't matter what I mean—the point is that Ruth isn't married; not even engaged, so she told me in her last letter. I ought to tell you I put the question to her—so—but the subject's not of the slightest interest to you, I'm sure."

Phil Heron made no reply. He was not in-

clined to agree with his sister. He had a very vivid recollection of a pair of beseeching eyes, of a soft, sympathetic voice, of pretty innocent ways which fascinated without the owner intending they should. Ruth Armitage was a girl who could, if she chose, twine herself round a man's heart so quietly that he would not be conscious she had done so, until he missed her presence. And this had been Phil Heron's fate. When Ruth said "good-bye" to him, he had tried to steel himself to the decree of fate which apparently ordained that they should never meet again, but he had found the effort very difficult. Yet he had never made love to the pretty, gentle girl; he had only thought a good deal about her.

When Amy suggested that the subject of Ruth's possible marriage was not of the slightest interest to her brother, she threw out the words as a feeler, but Phil was not to be drawn. Lighting his pipe, he sauntered to the riverside and contemplated the sunlit ripples until the luncheon gong sounded.

That afternoon he carried out his intention of calling at the Horse Guards, but there was no one in attendance whom he knew, and as he was too well acquainted with the routine not to be aware of the futility of explaining his business to strangers, he took a stroll in St. James's Park to kill time until the dinner hour. He was approaching the bridge over the ornamental water, when a hand smote him on the shoulder.

"Phil Heron!" said a cheery voice.

He turned instantly. It was an old comrade, a Major Walters, who had been at Addiscombe

with him, and afterwards in the Crimea at the same time. Bob Walters was as staunch-hearted a fellow as ever breathed, and was as ready with a joke as with his purse.

"Well, old fellow," said he, "and how are you getting on? Your fighting weight isn't quite what it was two years ago."

Heron's eleven stone was reduced to nine, his five-feet-nine of bone and sinew looked somewhat weedy, and Walters playfully pinched his arm.

"You're putting on a little muscle, but I shouldn't like to back you to cut a sheep in half with one blow, as I've seen you do it in the old days."

"That will come to pass again, I dare say, Bob," Heron answered lightly. "What is the latest news with you, old chap?"

"Good news. The old 101st is ordered to the East. We start from Southampton to-morrow."

"The East? Do you mean India?"

"No, no. There is nothing to be done in India. All is quiet there. China, lad, is our game."

"I wish you were going to India."

"My dear fellow, for what purpose?"

"For no particular purpose, save that I have been reading up Indian matters of late, and I've got it into my head that our position there is not so safe as we fancy it is."

"Pooh! England has got India in the hollow of her hand."

"Well, it may be so. If—— there, no doubt you're right."

Something in Heron's tone evidently struck

Walters as curious. He looked at his old friend steadfastly for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.

"What the deuce can go wrong in India? Our fellows have thorough control over the sepoy, and I believe the native troops would shoot down their own countrymen, were it necessary, and they were called upon to do it. But I must run away. I've a host of things before me."

"How many leave-takings?" asked Heron.

"Not many. I thank my stars no girl will cry her eyes out after me."

"Still adamant?"

"Yes, and likely to remain so. Good-bye, old chap."

"Good-bye. I envy you your luck. You'll come back from China Colonel Walters."

"May be or may not. Suppose a Chinese bullet finds its way into my skull? My dead body might figure as an idol in a joss-house. Who knows? I'm ugly enough."

"Get out, Bob. You're only fishing for compliments, and you won't get one from me."

Walters laughed, and with a wave of his hand rushed away.

A week or two went over. Heron had got no further at the Horse Guards. He wrote to a friendly official, who replied that for the moment he was out of favour with the authorities, and that speaking on Phil's behalf would do more harm than good. He suggested a personal application, and mentioned the name of an officer who might do him some service. Not believing much in formal applications, which

he knew were too often pigeon-holed, Philip Heron resolved to stay a few days in London, and call every day at the Horse Guards on the off-chance of coming across the man he wanted.

One morning he lounged into a West End Club, one much favoured by military men. There was rather a large number of members in the room for such an early hour. They were talking eagerly, and one old gentleman—an Indian general—was laying down the law with great emphasis.

"Mutiny!" "Barrackpore!" "An officer shot!" "Regiments disbanded," were among the disjointed sentences which reached Heron's ears.

He went up to the old soldier, who had possession of *The Times*, and asked him what had happened.

"Mutiny, by Gad, sir!" was the answer. "And if I'd been General Hearsey I'd have shot the ringleaders offhand. What's the good of his disbanding a regiment? Something much sterner's wanted to make an impression on those fellows. What did we do when a mutiny broke out in this very place, Barrackpore, in 1824? Fired upon them with artillery, and the cause of the outbreak was not nearly so serious as this. It had nothing to do with their religion. We heard no more of the mutiny. But this milk-and-water treatment of the scoundrels I don't like. We shall hear something more before long: mark my words!"

This old gentleman not many days before had been one of the most obstinate in maintaining that nothing like insubordination, much less

mutiny, could possibly happen in India. His sudden change of opinion, to Phil's mind, was ominous. Heron borrowed the paper, and read what *The Times* correspondent had to say.

The affair at Barrackpore happened on March 30, seven weeks before. There was no telegraphic communication from England beyond Trieste and Alexandria, and hence the time the news took in transmission. In the case of the outbreak at Meerut, when the horrors of the Mutiny first began, the time was even longer. The revolt at this station took place on Sunday, May 10. The Bombay correspondent of *The Times*, writing on June 9 alluded to the news as requiring confirmation; and not till June 27 was it actually known in England, and that the mutineers, after the scenes of bloodshed at Meerut, had marched upon Delhi, and repeated the horrors there. But not one in that club-room on the morning of May 19 could foresee these terrible scenes. Phil Heron read the account of the disbanding of the 19th Native Infantry at Barrackpore, and the shooting of Lieutenant Baugh by Mungul Pandey (from this name all the sepoys afterwards came to be known as "Pandies") with intense interest. Before he had reached the description of the men laying down their arms at Barrackpore, and of a scare at Dum-Dum sending all the Europeans hurrying in a fright to Calcutta, about eight miles away, he had made up his mind what to do.

"General Cuthbertson," said he, in a low voice to the old officer, "you know the directors of the East India Company?"

"Almost every one of them, from the chairman downwards," said the general.

"Give me an introduction to the director whom you think will do most for me. I'm anxious to be in India. I'm off the sick-list now, and I'm ready for some hard work."

General Cuthbertson was over seventy, but the fire of military ardour was not quite extinguished—at any rate, something in Phil Heron's glance rekindled the dying embers.

"And, by Jove, my lad, you'll have it!" exclaimed the veteran. "I'll write you a letter at once. We shall want a few thousand like you in India before this business is over."

The blood was coursing quickly through Heron's veins. How slow everything seemed! He already wanted to start on his journey, yet so much had to be done.

He took a cab to the gaunt, grim, dreary East India House in Leadenhall Street. Probably he would not have seen the director but for General Cuthbertson's introduction, for the great man was full of business. As it was, Heron was quickly ushered into a spacious room, where sat a bald-headed old gentleman, with a high stand-up collar binding each cheek, and with gold spectacles resting on his nose.

"You desire, Captain Heron, to volunteer your services?" said he curtly.

"Yes; I wish to depart at once. The overland route will, I presume, get me to Calcutta in a little less than six weeks."

"You are in a great hurry, young man."

"Is there no cause for hurry just now,

sir? What about this morning's news from India?"

"The newspapers exaggerate," replied the director pompously. "The Government of a century is not overturned in a day. This year, 1857, is the centenary of the taking of Calcutta by the great Clive, of the building of Fort William, and of the victory of Plassy. It would be a strange thing if, when we are about to erect a monument to Clive's memory, the Empire, the foundations of which he laid for us, should be in jeopardy."

Philip Heron was silent. It certainly did appear to be absurd, especially as he had no sounder arguments to advance than his own impressions.

"But we won't argue the point. I don't blame you for being anxious over the welfare of India. Here are some preliminary papers, which you will read over and sign, and then I should advise you to go to the War Office, and take your instructions direct from the military authorities. Good morning."

Phil Heron was a new man. He did not care a jot for the director's abrupt dismissal. He felt he was already on the way to India, that in two months or so he should be in Cawnpore—for it was to some regiment stationed there to which he desired to be attached. There might have been some difficulty in accomplishing this, for red tape is all-powerful; but maybe the War Office had private information, and knew that men would be wanted, and so before long the arrangements were made.

The next mail steamer left Southampton in

two days, and he had, consequently, not much time for preparations. But the less luggage he took the better; he soon got together what was necessary, and he did not tell his sister Amy his intention until the eve of his departure. She heard him with sad eyes.

"Aren't you very unwise to select such an unhealthy climate in your state of health?" she asked.

Heron shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm quite well, Amy," said he. "But, health or no health, I'm going."

"Well, it's a great mercy there's no war in India. I shan't cry over you as I did when you went to the Crimea. Still, I'm puzzled. Why do you want to go to India, and in so great a hurry, too?"

Heron's sister Amy was a little, fair, blue-eyed woman, who generally managed to get her way in everything. Her hair brushed her brother's chin as she put one hand on each of his shoulders and looked into his face. She was shrewd, and she read his countenance like a book.

"You are going because Ruth Armitage is there," said she quickly.

Heron laughed, but his laugh was forced. He said little more. He did not allude to the risks to which Ruth was exposed, nor did he mention the real object which was taking him so hastily to India. Had he told Amy of the workings of his mind, she would have laughed at him for a dreamer.

The next morning about twelve o'clock saw Heron at Southampton. The steamer was timed to start at half-past one, and the last consign-

ment of luggage was being hastily deposited on board. He sought out his cabin, and, as an old campaigner—his Crimean experiences had taught him no end of dodges—he busied himself in arranging his goods and chattels so as to have that handiest which was most wanted, and then he went on deck. One of the ship's officers approached the captain just as Philip reached him. "High water, sir," said he.

This was the signal. The *Coromandel* lazily revolved her paddles, and the huge mass began to move, but so slowly that only the gentle vibrations seemed to indicate motion. But the narrow outlet from the docks was drawing nearer, and gradually the steamer was warped out.

At a convenient distance from the docks she dropped anchor, there to await the coming of the overland mail and the late passengers. A fussy little steamer arrived alongside, and, after a quarter of an hour of intense bustle and seemingly dire confusion, all was declared to be ready, and soon after the vessel was rapidly cleaving Southampton Water towards the Channel.

It was a glorious sunset, but Philip Heron was not in the vein to enjoy it. The setting sun flooded the restless waves with a blood red, and to his excited imagination there was something ominous in the colour. Then the crimson faded away, and the cold grey of the coming night buried everything in an ashen-hued pall.

As the first was typical of the realisation of vengeance, of the lust for blood, of seething hate, and ungovernable passions, so the second suggested an abyss of gloom and despair.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN WOULD THE TIME OF VENGEANCE COME ?

WHILE Dr. Stainton with grave face was sitting by Dick's bed, puzzled by symptoms in the young man's stupor which he had a difficulty in diagnosing, a very different scene was being enacted in the palace at Bithoor. Nana Sahib, like Dick Heron, was also lying prostrate. Indolence, sensuality, self-indulgence, pampered vanity were written in his pallid, unwholesome-looking, puffy cheeks, his dull, sleepy eyes, his limp mouth.

The Maharajah was embedded in soft cushions. Reclining by his side was Adala, his favourite dancing-girl. Azimoolah Khan was sitting cross-legged in front, his alert, wily face presenting a strong contrast to that of the gross voluptuary, who, with drooping eyelids, had been listening languidly to Azimoolah's story, how Dick Heron had been lured into the palace, and how the scheme of influencing him through the arts of Hooseinee Khanum had failed.

"Hooseinee is too old," said the Nana with a yawn.

"Adala would have done better, but she would not consent," returned the Mahomedan, shrugging his shoulders, "and had she consented Your Highness would have been angry."

"Adala is mine. Have I not spent a king's ransom upon her?" said the Nana, turning his fishy eyes on the girl. "Have I spoken truly, Adala?"

The girl bent her head low, and lifting the hem of the Nana's robe, she raised it to her lips.

Azimoolah Khan watched the proceeding with a sneer. He knew well enough that Adala was no better than the rest of the army of parasites, fawning on the Maharajah, for what they could squeeze out of him.

"Send for Hooseinee Khanum. I would question her," said the Nana presently.

The woman was summoned. She marched in obediently, and salaamed in the usual fashion, but there was contempt in the gesture. The Nana inspired no respect.

"You boast of your arts, Hooseinee," said he. "Why did you not conquer the Englishman?"

"How do I know? Englishmen are not like our race. They are cold, bloodless."

"You gave him sweetmeats?"

"Yes."

"And he ate?"

"Yes, he ate. He was angry with me. It was Adala he expected to see. We quarrelled. He flung me to the ground. He hates me."

"And you, Hooseinee?"

"I hate him."

"That is well," drawled the Nana, after a pause. "You may go. You are not to blame."

The woman salaamed and departed. The Maharajah sank into the silken cushions, exhausted by the call his questioning had made

upon his brain. Azimoolah waited a few minutes for his master to recover himself, and went on :

" My lord sees now that his servant was right. I have told you the truth. What could Hooseinee Khanum have fooled the young Englishman into telling ? He has no secrets. You could have heard no more from him than you knew already. The time has come to strike. Why do you delay ? "

" I would like to be certain. You say there are but few Englishmen left in their own country. Do you swear that is the truth ? "

" I swear by Allah it is so. The English have no soldiers but those in India. The bones of the rest are whitening in the land of the Russians. Gold and blood have been wasted in the Crimea. England has been stabbed to the heart. She is crippled. Has not England treated you with injustice ? Has she not robbed you of your rights, and trampled upon the laws of our fathers ? I pleaded in vain for you in London. The Company refused to listen to my prayer. There is nothing left for you but revenge. Never was there a more fitting time for vengeance than now. It is the will of Allah and with his help we will sweep our land free of the accursed dogs ! "

The Mahomedan in his excitement had sprung to his feet, and with his long arms waving and his slim body slightly arched, he was not unlike a bird of evil omen. His voice was no longer soft and silky, but harsh and guttural.

Azimoolah's vehemence, so unusual in one who had such complete command over himself,

the sinister light in his eyes, roused the flaccid nerves of the Maharajah, like the lash of a whip. But he was not entirely convinced.

"That may be so, Azimoolah Khan," said he in a wavering tone, "but Captain Howar Kendrith has said differently."

By Howar Kendrith the Nana meant Howard Kendrick. The natives of India have a peculiar faculty in the alteration of the names of Europeans to suit their own methods of pronunciation. Azimoolah Khan was an exception. He had passed a considerable time in England; he had a gift for acquiring languages, and he had conquered the difficulties of English speech.

"And what has Captain Howard Kendrick said?" asked Azimoolah scornfully.

"That there are thousands of soldiers in England; that they have many ships and much treasure. The English will never let our people go," cried the Nana, with something like energy, so much so that Adala thought it necessary to wave her fan of peacocks' feathers about his face.

"Howard Kendrick is a liar. Did he not a year ago promise to intercede on your behalf with his father, the director of the Company? What has come of it? Nothing. Yet you have loaded him with rupees. How much of your money has he not thrown away on horse racing, on cards, on women?"

It was true. Howard Kendrick had been particularly friendly with the Nana, had made the adopted son of Bajee Rao believe he could do great things, and he had dipped freely into

the Nana's purse, but with no result, and latterly the Nana had received him coldly.

The reason Kendrick had given that very day why he would not be present at the officers' mess was false. He had no intention of buying a horse, and his journey was not for that purpose, but to borrow money from the Maharajah. He had ridden to the palace, and to his disgust had been refused an audience. The refusal was couched in the most respectful terms, and accompanied by profuse apologies, but Kendrick was not deceived. He rode away in a towering passion, for he had set his heart upon obtaining a sum large enough, not only to pay the most pressing of his debts, but also to be in a position to dazzle Ruth Armitage with an idea of his wealth.

Azimoolah saw that his arguments were having weight with the credulous Maharajah, and he pushed home his advantage.

"I have news for your lordship—great news," said he, going back to his tone of insinuating confidence. "I had deferred it until you had seen for yourself that Hooseinee Khanum could do nothing. The 19th regiment at Barrackpore has, as you already know, begun to show the way. The English think by disarming and disbanding they have removed the danger. We know differently. Some of the 19th are now in the lines at Cawnpore. These men are Brahmins; they have talked to others of their own caste here; they have told of things which have happened at Barrackpore, of the insults to their sacred religion, of the more insults to come. The chupatty is passing from hand to hand;

the people are already saying among themselves 'Sub la! hoga hi' (everything is to become red). We are ready. We are only waiting your lordship's commands. The astrologers everywhere are prophesying that this year, the hundredth from the battle of Plassy, will see the end of the red coats. And you, my lord, will be at Delhi, uncountable riches at your feet, the omnipotent ruler of this mighty land, freed from the vultures of John Company, freed from the bayonets of England. You have seen the English maidens here. They are more beautiful than the girls of Cashmere. They can be made to love our race. Have I not told you of the ladies of Belgravia, of Mayfair—every word is true. You have seen their letters to me when I was in London. And you, yourself, Maharajah, do you not admire the English rose of Cawnpore—Ruth Armitage?"

"I must have time, Azimoolah, to think over this," interposed the Nana, much disturbed. "The English are strong. I must be sure that others are with us before I act. When I do so, there will be no going back. Have I not sworn that my wrongs can be righted only in blood? Not a man, not a woman, not a child shall escape. My vengeance shall be complete when the time comes. Leave me, Azimoolah, to my thoughts. Adala, summon the musicians."

Azimoolah salaamed low. He knew thoroughly the man with whom he was dealing. He had but to excite the Nana's cupidity, his vanity, his passions, his lust for blood. He had laid the train, now let the fuse smoulder.

WHEN WOULD THE TIME COME ? 77

For the next hour the Nana permitted himself to be amused by his nautch girls, headed by Adala, all of them beautiful, with soft, dark eyes and flowing raven hair. They sang as they danced to the dreamy monotones of stringed instruments ; some of them played by a bow, others with the fingers. The bangles on their wrists and ankles jingled, the bells on their ornaments tinkled in time with the music ; they glided, they twined their bodies, they curved their arms, each movement of the dance having its meaning—love, hope, jealousy, hatred, defiance. From their figures was wafted a perfume ; sweet-scented flowers were intertwined with their hair, their jewels were dazzling, their raiment gorgeous.

The dance, alternately soothing and exciting, failed to help the Maharajah to make up his mind ; it simply lulled him into a state of voluptuous stupor. In imagination he saw himself at Delhi, living very much the life of Shah Alum, the old Mogul Emperor, who came under the protection of the British in 1803, when Lord Lake obtained possession of the city of Delhi. The Palace of Delhi at that time was a centre of sensuality and crime. One who wrote with knowledge, obtained at first hand, describes how wrestlers, jesters, dancing-girls, musicians, forgers, swindlers, thieves, receivers of stolen property, distillers of spirits, compounders of sweetmeats and opium, all formed a part of the palace community.

Sensual intrigue was rife. Wives intrigued against wives, mothers against sons, men and

women scoured the country far and wide for beautiful girls to sell as slaves within the palace. In such a hotbed of villainy any conspiracy was possible. Assassinations were frequent, and the silent river was close at hand to bear away all traces of the victim. The Bithoor palace was not so steeped in vice as that of Delhi, but in its hidden recesses it ran it very close.

The languorous dance ended, the twanging and scraping of the instruments ceased. His Highness was in the mood for sleep. His heavy eyelids drooped; dreams of the revenge over which in the waking hours of the day he was continually pondering, succeeded to his visions of self-indulgence and unbounded wealth.

Revenge was rarely absent from the Nana's thoughts. The men of the hated race whom he entertained so sumptuously, the women he smiled upon and loaded with costly presents, saw nothing in him but the harmless victim of pleasure. How they would have been undeceived could they have penetrated his actual thoughts!

The fat, lazy sensualist's hatred of England was actuated by motives as base as his own nature. The Nana was, as already mentioned, the eldest son, by adoption, of Bajee Rao, the last of the Mahratta kings. By the Hindoo *Shasters*, or scriptures, there is a fearful doom awarded to those who die childless; and in order to avert a terrible fate, the system of adoption "when natural issue fails," is permitted. Seereek Dhoondoo Punth, who, some say, was the son of a Poonah corn merchant, while others assert his

father was a ryot living in an obscure village near Bombay, was given the rights and privileges of a naturally born heir. Bajee Rao died in 1851, and Dhoondoo Punth inherited all the landed property, houses, and jewels of the deposed king. But this did not content the rapacious Dhoondoo; he wanted also Bajee Rao's pension of £80,000, which Lord Dalhousie had stopped. Dhoondoo sent a memorial to the Governor of the North-West Province, and this being unsuccessful, he dispatched Azimoolah Khan to England to plead his cause with the East India Company and the Government.

Azimoolah, who had risen from the position of a khitmutgar to that of a teacher in the Government School in Cawnpore, was a man of considerable attainments and inordinate ambition. He could speak English and French; his manners were polished, and in London fashionable ladies swarmed round him. Successful as he was in society, he failed both with the Company and the Government. Disappointed and enraged, he returned to Cawnpore with a tale that his non-success was due to the Company bribing the English Government.

The lie would not have mattered much; what did matter was his belief that the power of England was broken. This belief was based on what he had seen and heard in Constantinople, through which city he had come on his journey home. In Constantinople, at that time, it was the opinion that the English army would meet its fate in the Crimea as the French army half a century before had at Moscow. It was Azi-

moolah's object to possess the Nana also with this belief. The crafty Mahomedan knew if he could set up the puppet Nana as ruler of India, that unlimited gold would roll into the pockets of his prime minister. Hence he was untiring in his insidious counsels. The Nana's rights had been ignored by these dogs of Englishmen. Vengeance should be his.

When would the time of vengeance come? That was the question the Maharajah was impatient to solve. If he could only be sure that Azimoolah spoke the truth when he said the power of England was crippled! At that very moment the crafty mind of Azimoolah Khan, whose craving for revenge was more intense and deadly than that of his master, was planning how he could spur the indolent Nana up to the striking point. Hoosainee Khanum had failed with Dick Heron; some other plan must be tried; some other Englishman selected. Azimoolah fixed upon Howard Kendrick for his next attempt.

CHAPTER VII

AZIMOOLAH LAYS THE TRAIN

IN total ignorance of the hideous plotting of the Nana and his lieutenant, and blind to the signs of the gathering storm, life in Cawnpore went on very much as usual. The chief amusement was the retailing of scandal, and for some little time the most important piece of gossip was the strange illness of Lieutenant Dick Heron. For a whole day he had been unconscious; then followed a species of delirious fever, which lasted almost a week, and when his wandering senses returned he was unable to give any explanation how he had been attacked or where he had been. Dr. Stainton was certain he had taken a drug of some kind, not necessarily a poison, but of what nature could not be determined.

Another piece of gossip was the rumour that clamorous demands were being made upon Howard Kendrick by his many creditors, and that if he could not satisfy them within a week something would have to be done. What some of these creditors feared was that he would exchange into another regiment, and that they would have to whistle for their money. His influence, thanks to his father being a director of the East India Company, would do for him

what others less advantageously placed might sigh for in vain. It was true that the father, tired of his son's extravagance and dissipation, had refused to pay any more of his debts; but though Sir Oliver Kendrick might refuse to part with money he might help his son in other ways.

Two days after Dick's attack, Howard Kendrick was sitting in his bungalow smoking, sipping brandy-and-soda, and scowling—especially scowling. He had not overcome his disappointment at his failure to see the Nana, nor was he likely to forget it. Unable to pay his debts of honour, he had had the salt rubbed in pretty thickly on the parade, on the racecourse and in the mess-room. Virtually he had been sent to Coventry.

The thing was the more galling because Dick Heron being practically *hors de combat*, Kendrick had the field all to himself, so far as Ruth Armitage was concerned. He dared not put in an appearance at Mrs. Waring's while the cloud was hanging over him, because the Colonel was bound to know his position, and maybe, had said something both to his wife and to Ruth about his being under a cloud.

"A cursed nuisance," he muttered, as he knocked off the ash from his cigar. "If I write to the pater it'll take months before I have his reply, and then it may be unfavourable. It's no use going to the bank: I've already overdrawn my account pretty heavily, and dashed if I know any fellow who'd lend me even a fiver—not that a fiver would be of much use. Beastly nuisance. I shan't forget in a hurry how the chaps at loo last night in the club card-room

froze when they saw me coming. A month ago I was sure of a ten-pound note any night."

This was quite true. Kendrick's luck at all forms of card gambling was phenomenal. Some of his comrades had their doubts as to whether luck was entirely the cause of his success.

His cigar had gone out while he was cogitating, and, flinging it away with an oath, he lighted another, and was drawing the first whiff when a servant entered and announced the arrival of a visitor—Azimoolah Khan.

Kendrick's scowl deepened. The sight of Azimoolah Khan reminded him of his rebuff at the palace, and he did not take the trouble to rise when the Nana's treasurer entered, nor did he acknowledge the man's entrance in any way. He simply stared coldly at the visitor.

Azimoolah, in spite of the important position he held in the Maharajah's household, was treated with scant respect by the English officers. Apart from the fact that the sepoys and the natives in general were regarded slightly, and called niggers, a term which Trevelyan tells us made its first appearance in decent society during the years which immediately preceded the Mutiny—Azimoolah was looked at askance because of his low birth, and because every one knew he was an adventurer.

Very few in Cawnpore knew of his prowess in London fashionable society, and those who did were only the more contemptuous in their demeanour towards him. Of these, one was Howard Kendrick. He had heard of Azimoolah's exploits, through his father, the Company

director, but it suited his purposes to keep his knowledge to himself. He had an idea the *ex-khitmutgar* might be useful in helping him to fleece the Nana.

Azimoolah took no notice of Kendrick's rudeness. He bowed obsequiously, and did not presume to take a seat.

"The Maharajah has sent me to apologise to you, Captain Kendrick, and to express his regret he was unable to give himself the pleasure of receiving you when you did him the honour to call."

"Ob," said Kendrick gruffly, "I've had enough of your master's apologies. I don't think I want any more. If that's the only object in your coming to see me you needn't have wasted your time and mine."

"I entreat you not to be angry with your servant. I quite admit that you are justified in feeling resentment towards the Maharajah, but if you will be good enough to extend to me the privilege of a few minutes' conversation, I think I can convince you that your time will *not* have been wasted. I am under many obligations to you, Captain Kendrick, and I wish to show you my appreciation of your kindness, and in a very material way."

"What does that mean, you wily scoundrel?" Kendrick asked himself. "Have you come to offer me a loan now that the fat, greasy Nana has dried up? After all, you *do* owe me something. I might have damned you out of every set here if I'd opened my mouth. I could have made a few good stories out of the '*Khitmutgar Prince*' and his doings."

"Sit down," he growled aloud, "and say what you have to say."

Azimoolah obeyed, arranging his limbs with the ease of a European, in what is an uncomfortable position for the Oriental, unaccustomed to chairs.

"If I might crave permission to make a suggestion to Captain Kendrick, who must be a much more skilful diplomatist than a poor ignorant man like myself can ever hope to be, I would venture to say, as one knowing intimately the weaknesses and vanity of the Maharajah, that the way to make him a generous friend is to gratify those weaknesses and flatter that vanity. Do I make myself understood to your lordship?"

"Hanged if you do? Do you mean that I'm to go cap in hand and bow and scrape to the Nana?"

"Heaven forbid," rejoined Azimoolah, almost indignant at the insinuation. "Permit me to explain. I need not remind you that the Maharajah is smarting under a sense of having been unfairly treated by the Company and by the English Government. To Englishmen personally he is much attached. He admires them; he has given innumerable proofs of his friendship to the English residents in Cawnpore, and I fancy I am right in saying that you yourself could bear witness to that."

"Oh, as you chaps go the Nana's not a bad fellow. I never said he was. The best thing about him is the way he's adapted himself to English customs and tastes. He's as good a

hand with a billiard cue as any of us ; though he doesn't play as nice a game as he used, and I told him so the last time we had a hundred up. He's put on too much flesh."

"You are perfectly right," rejoined Azimoolah regretfully. "I only wish you had more opportunities of giving the Maharajah the benefit of your counsel. It is really with some such object that I have taken the liberty of calling on you now. The Maharajah would like to see you again, I know. What happened the other day was not his fault, but was due to the stupid blundering of a servant who misunderstood his orders, and who has since been severely punished."

Kendrick heard all this with secret satisfaction. At the same time, knowing as he did something of the ways of the natives, and that they never acted without a motive, he wondered what was coming.

"That's right enough ; but it was dashed annoying all the same," said he.

"The Maharajah is quite of your opinion. He would like to see you, and not only tender his apologies in person, but proffer you some practical compensation," rejoined Azimoolah, drooping his eyes, but without ceasing to watch the effect of his words on the young officer.

Nothing could please Kendrick more. Said he condescendingly :

"I don't bear any malice, but I don't intend to call on him again without a written invitation."

"And that you will have. Pardon me for

approaching a matter, which I desire to allude to with the greatest delicacy and respect. You are so lavish and open-handed, that it is not wonderful your good heart should sometimes land you into embarrassments. Now, I happen to know that the Maharajah is desirous of placing a sum of money at your disposal, and I feel certain that sum would be considerably larger if your lordship chose to amuse yourself in the way I suggested—I mean flattering the Maharajah's vanity."

Again Azimoolah drooped his eyelids as if apologising for his temerity. Kendrick saw he was approaching the object of his visit.

"How?" he asked haughtily. "Can't you come to the point?"

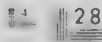
"I am grateful to you for the suggestion. I will do so. The Maharajah nurses the absurd misapprehension that England is not only staggering under the blow inflicted by the Russian war, but that the maintenance of her rule in India is a heavy drain on her military resources; in a word, that she cannot spare another man to strengthen her power here. The Maharajah's advisers know that the contrary is the case. I who have been in England have told him so, but he is difficult to convince. His notions are childish, and no one agrees with them. But what are we to do with such a nature? His craze is a harmless one, and we have to humour him. Those who do so benefit greatly."

Azimoolah suddenly raised his eyes. Kendrick read the meaning of his glance. It had a



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personal application. But he said nothing. He waited for the explanation, which he knew he could not hurry by showing impatience. The native of the East is either savagely direct in his methods or tediously roundabout.

The explanation came. Azimoolah cautiously suggested that if Kendrick would condescend to play down to the Nana's foible as to the gradual weakening of England it would be enormously to his advantage. Had not his lordship, Azimoolah asked with extreme deference, hitherto laughed at the Maharajah's ideas on the subject?

"Why, of course; who wouldn't?" retorted Kendrick with a jeer.

"Quite so. Your lordship is right. In England I learned a proverb. It might have been written by one of our race. It runs, 'Answer a fool according to his folly.' I have no more to say. I thank your lordship for the favour he has bestowed upon his servant in deigning to listen to him. The Maharajah will send his invitation."

Bowing more in Eastern than in European fashion, Azimoolah took his departure.

"Beastly disgusting to have to kotow to a gross debaucher," muttered Kendrick: "but it might be worth while to agree with the vain fool that England is going to the dogs. After all, it's only what I've heard scores of old asses stiffened with English pipeclay say of the Service. Beggars can't afford to be choosers."

That evening the Nana's invitation, couched in abjectly courteous terms, reached Howard Kendrick. He accepted it.

Within a week after his interview with the Nizam, Kendrick had settled his debts of honour. To explain his possession of funds, he hinted that he had made it up with his "governor" some time ago, but until now had thought it well to keep his mouth shut. "The old boy has proved himself a trump," said Kendrick lightly to his friends, "and there's no necessity for any further secrecy. Of course, I've promised to run straight for the future, and I'm going to keep my word."

He uttered these words for a purpose—he knew they would reach Colonel Waring's ears, and he wanted them to pave the way to enable him to "make the running," for winning Ruth Armitage, while Dick Heron was lying helplessly on his back. Two days after, Kendrick was back in his old set, and things were apparently going well with him, though he had not yet ventured to approach Ruth.

Jack Hurst in the meantime had returned from Benares with dispatches and what news he could pick up. It was now nearing the end of April, and Hurst reported that on the 8th Mangal Pandey, the private of the 34th who, under the influence of bhang and religious fanaticism, had run amok and had incited his comrades to rebellion, had been hanged at Barrackpore after being condemned by court-martial. No further outward trouble had followed the disbanding of the 34th and 19th, but the contagion of discontent was spreading, and in a very mysterious way. It was not confined to the sepoys, but had reached the domestic servants, many of whom had actually insulted their employers.

Meanwhile the distribution of chupatties, innocent-looking flat cakes of salt and dough, was going on from hand to hand in every village and hamlet with increased activity. No Englishman knew exactly what the chupatty signified, and the natives were little wiser. All that could be learned was that men would do well to keep themselves prepared, as something was about to happen.

According to Hurst's information, this increased activity dated to about a week before his return to Cawnpore. Was it of sinister coincidence that this date should approximately agree with that of Kendrick's visit to the Nana?

CHAPTER VIII

THE HEART OF AN ENGLISH GIRL

MRS. WARING was not holding a reception this suffocating evening. She always found the hot season very trying to her nerves, and feeling unequal to the strain of entertaining her friends she had sent out cards cancelling the function. Looking more fragile than ever, she was lying on a couch within range of the current of air created by the punkah; but the relief afforded by the cambrous apparatus did not suffice, and Ruth in a bamboo rocking-chair was fanning the lady's sallow face.

"That'll do, dear," said she in a querulous tone. "The constant movement of your fan makes me quite giddy. I wish I could go to sleep, but with the punkah's horrid creak, creak, it's impossible."

Ruth, without a word, closed the fan, and sat swaying herself gently. She was used to Mrs. Waring's attacks of "vapours." Fifteen years ago Mrs. Waring, then Miss Bosanquet, was the beauty of Allahabad, where at that time Colonel Waring was stationed. She had come out from England to marry, and she succeeded in capturing the Colonel. He was five-and-twenty years older than she, but disparity in age is no obstacle

in India to marriage. Mrs. Waring's beauty was not of the type which wears well, and there was now not much left of the good looks which made her the belle of the station.

"I'm half sorry I put off those people," she went on after a pause. "Excitement always does me good. I feel horribly washed out. I want a change badly. I shall talk to the Colonel about going to the Hills. Being so near the Ganges makes Cawnpore frightfully enervating and unhealthy. Besides, the place is fearfully monotonous. I suppose the men don't feel it as we do. They've plenty of occupation, what with their duties and their racing, pig-sticking, billiards, cards, and all that sort of thing. But even they must get tired of doing practically nothing, and I'm not surprised that some of them drink and gamble."

"It's a great pity," said Ruth absently. She was not particularly interested in what Mrs. Waring was saying. She had heard the lady express much the same sentiments many times before. Besides, her thoughts were thousands of miles away—in England.

"By the way, talking of men who drink and gamble," went on Mrs. Waring, with a little more animation, "have you heard that Captain Kendrick has made it up with his father?"

"Has he?" rejoined the girl in the same abstracted way.

"Yes. It's said Kendrick's turned over a new leaf. It's very wise of him. Sir Oliver Kendrick's a millionaire, and if he behaves himself, Howard will come into all his father's money. The best

thing he can do is to marry and settle down. Have you ever thought about him, Ruth ? ”

“ In what way ? ”

“ My dear,” exclaimed Mrs. Waring pettishly, “ there’s only one way a woman in India ever thinks about a man—as a possible husband ; that is if he’s free to marry ? ”

“ I’m an exception to the rule, I suppose. It’s never occurred to me to think about men in that light.”

“ Girls always talk like that, of course. What I should be glad to know from you, is what other prospects you have other than marrying ? ”

Ruth could make no reply to this vital question. She knew very well that the small sum left her by her father had been dipped into pretty freely by the expenses of her education in England. The remainder would last but a very few years. Colonel Waring was thinking of retiring and leaving India. She could hardly expect to burden herself upon him then.

Matchmaking was Mrs. Waring’s delight, and she really wanted to see Ruth marry well. She showed her interest in the subject by a little energy. She shifted her position, and, leaning on her elbow, she looked searchingly at the girl.

“ I’ve reason to know that a very slight encouragement from you would bring a proposal from Captain Kendrick,” said she smilingly.

“ If it depends upon me, he’ll never have that encouragement,” said Ruth hastily. “ I don’t want to marry a drunkard and a gambler. Didn’t you yourself, not so very long ago, warn me against him ? ”

"Oh, that was when he had quarrelled with his father, and his prospects were worth nothing at all. It's quite different now. He can't be so bad, as some make out, because the instant he received a remittance from Sir Oliver—as a sort of sign, I suppose, that peace was proclaimed—he set about paying his debts. A reformed rake, you know, often makes the best husband."

"And the task of reformation generally falls to the lot of the wife. No, thank you. I don't care to undertake such a responsibility."

"Really your notions, Ruth, are ridiculous," retorted Mrs. Waring, a little angrily. "The love of a good wife alone has its effect."

"I don't deny it, but——"

Ruth finished the sentence with a shrug of her round shoulders. The impatient gesture had its meaning, which the experienced lady on the couch had no difficulty in interpreting correctly.

"I hope you're not going to be silly. If you throw yourself away on some penniless young man, you'll speedily repent it. To begin with, you'll spoil his chances of promotion. Married men in the army without means are frightfully handicapped. I suppose your head's full of Lieutenant Heron——"

"Oh, Mrs. Waring," interrupted Ruth, her cheeks scarlet. "You've no right to say such a thing. Mr. Heron is nothing to me."

"I'm very glad to hear it. He seems to be on the downward path, if all's true that's said about him. You remember what Captain Kendrick told us—that affair at the Nana's, I mean."

"Of course I remember, and I thought Captain Kendrick showed very bad taste in telling tales against a comrade," cried Ruth indignantly. "I've no doubt Howard Kendrick was as bad as—as—Mr. Heron. Perhaps worse."

"That's nothing to do with it; besides, there's a great difference between the two. Howard Kendrick's the son of a wealthy man, and young Heron has little more than his pay. What is a trifle to one who's rich is often very awkward and damaging to one who's not. Captain Kendrick may have exaggerated, but it's clear his story had some foundation. Lieutenant Heron's illness looks very queer. It's rumoured that he got into some disgraceful squabble, and brought the attack upon himself. But we needn't waste time over young Heron. I want you to think seriously about your own position. It would be nice if something could be settled before I went away. You understand what I mean, don't you?"

Ruth understood perfectly well. She had been painfully conscious for some time past that Mrs. Waring regarded her with unfavourable eyes, and for more than one reason. The principal perhaps was that her youth, beauty, and freshness made the Colonel's wife look older and more faded. Naturally men were attracted by Ruth, and Mrs. Waring no longer held undisputed sway in her little court. Then there was the evident partiality the Colonel showed towards the daughter of his old comrade. It might be going too far to say that his wife was jealous of the girl, but she certainly did not like

her husband spending so much money on Ruth's dress and finery. It was also clear that when Colonel Waring retired on his pension, he would have to be economical, and the lady considered that any spare cash he had should be hers. Probably most married ladies would support these views.

Ruth would have been blind and deaf not to be perfectly aware of Mrs. Waring's growing hostility towards her, for the lady did not often let slip an opportunity of making known her sentiments. Moreover, it was perfectly clear to the girl that her only chance of independence was in marriage. She had had two offers since she had been in Cawnpore from men holding good positions in the Civil Service, and had refused both. Half a dozen officers of various ranks were ready to fall in love with her, but she kept them at arm's length. So far as the impetuous ones were concerned, Mrs. Waring had been exceedingly helpful. The lady knew how to deal with would-be suitors who were ineligible.

As Mrs. Waring said, it was all-important that the question of her future should be settled. Had she had friends in England, Ruth might have solved the difficulty by returning to the old country. But she knew very few people—Amy Heron perhaps was the one of all her English friends with whom she had most acquaintance. She certainly liked Amy best, but she had a reason for not seeking Amy's assistance, and that reason was not wholly unconnected with her abstraction of mind a few minutes before.

When Ruth blushed at the mention of Dick Heron's name, it was not on account of Dick, but of his brother Philip. Phil had, without knowing it, won her heart. She had woven many a web of girlish fancy about the handsome hus-ar, who was doubly interesting to her, by reason of his share in the famous Balaclava charge, and the wound he had received. Perhaps it was because she knew how futile were those fancies, that she thought the more about him. Her love belonged purely to her imagination, but it was none the less sweet and enduring on that account.

So it came about that when she met Dick Heron she was drawn towards him for his brother's sake. She liked Dick immensely, but directly the impulsive lad showed symptoms of a feeling stronger than mere friendship, she unmercifully snubbed him. Of course the poor boy could not understand the girl's waywardness—how should he?—and he fancied he had offended her in some way.

The turn the conversation with Mrs. Waring had taken and the lady's unexpected championship of Howard Kendrick, had plunged Ruth into a perturbation of heart and mind, which for the moment made her silent. She wanted to have time to realise everything fairly, but she was not given the chance.

"Well, you don't say anything," broke in Mrs. Waring upon Ruth's reverie impatiently. "You can't accuse me of not having furthered your interests in every way. I might have persuaded you to look favourably on Howard

Kendrick, but I didn't do so when his reputation was not over good, and when apparently his father had cast him off, but things having changed, there's no earthly reason why——"

A white-robed servant at this moment entered salaaming obsequiously. He held a card in his hand which he handed to his mistress.

"The very man we were talking about—Howard Kendrick," cried Mrs. Waring excitedly. "How fortunate. Really, it seems as if it was to be. My dear Ruth, now's your opportunity. I'm sure he's come to see you, and not myself."

The lady forgot her nerves, and hastily rose from the couch. Ruth would have quitted the room, but Mrs. Waring was between her and the door, and there was also the possibility of her encountering Howard Kendrick. Whatever chance she had of escape was speedily gone, for Kendrick had entered, Mrs. Waring had greeted him effusively, and he was expressing a hope that her indisposition would soon disappear.

"Oh, it's only one of my nervous headaches—nothing very serious, but it makes me rather a dull companion. Ruth must make up for my shortcomings. My dear, do your best to entertain Captain Kendrick while I get Davis to bathe my forehead with eau-de-Cologne."

And to Ruth's dismay Mrs. Waring whisked out of the room with much rustling of her ample skirt, and the girl was left alone with the visitor.

"I may at least congratulate you, Miss Armitage, on standing this beastly climate so well," said Kendrick, retaining the hand she had, out of mere politeness, held out to him.

"I suppose it is because I'm in my native air," said she. "I was born in India."

"Yes, so I've heard. I don't know whether to envy you or offer my sympathy. For myself, I hate the place, and I shan't rest till I persuade my father to let me sell my commission and get out of it."

"You don't like a military life, then," said Ruth a little coldly.

"It's so beastly dull and uninteresting. I suppose if there was some fighting to be done it wouldn't be so bad, but as it is—well, the fellows one has to associate with don't make the life more agreeable. Awfully good chaps, of course, and very well to meet at mess and all that kind of thing, but outside regimental matters they bore one to death. Most of 'em are men whose families hold no sort of position."

"I'm sorry," said Ruth ironically. "How came it you were so unlucky as to enter the army?"

"Pitchforked into it, my dear Miss Armitage. There's always been one soldier of our family in the service of the Company for the last three generations, and my father insisted I should represent the fourth. Of course, I had to knuckle under, but it won't be for long; I'm going to clear out, and that's why I wanted to have a little confidential chat with you."

"You honour me," rejoined Ruth, with a sudden flutter of her heart. "But what have I to do with you leaving the army?"

"Everything. Can't you guess?"

He advanced a pace towards her. She retreated instinctively.

"Don't run away," he went on. "I've really something most important to say, and you *must* hear it."

"*Must?*" she repeated in a tone of mingled surprise and anger.

"I beg your pardon, I did not mean to speak so imperatively, but there are times when one is not master of one's words. I'll put what I wish to say in another form—as a confession, eh?"

Ruth had her eyes fixed apprehensively on his face. It was not a nice face at any time. The small shifty eyes and scanty brows, the foxy-coloured side whiskers, the weak, loosely lipped mouth always gave her an unpleasant impression, and just now his sickly false smile and his attempt to ingratiate himself were particularly repugnant.

"I'd rather not listen to you, Captain Kendrick. I hate confessions of any kind," she exclaimed hastily.

"Hang it, you don't help a fellow a bit. I came to tell you that I love you—that I want you to be my wife. I've never seen any girl half as nice as you. It isn't as if I was a poor man, like most of the chaps stationed here. You know all about my father, don't you? We had a bit of a shindy some time ago, but that's all over. He's a first-rate old boy, and I've only to take you to England, and present you to him, and he'll do anything you like to ask him. He wishes me to marry and settle down. He's said so over and over again in his letters. I can show them to you if you like."

Howard Kendrick poured out his words rapidly, but quick as he was in saying them Ruth had time to regain her self-possession.

"I'd rather not, thank you. I don't want to know your father's wishes. They're no concern of mine. If you're anxious to marry because your father desires it I'm sure you'll have no difficulty in finding a lady to oblige both him and you."

Kendrick's lips paled and twitched slightly. Ruth's sarcasm stung him, but he tried not to betray himself.

"You misunderstand me—really you do. It's not because of my father that I want to marry you—that would be absurd, childish. I only dragged him in to show you that with his approval you'd be as my wife a very rich woman. Do listen, please."

Ruth had turned impatiently from him. She was asking herself why the man couldn't see that his proposal was rejected, and his arguments offensive, without putting her to the embarrassment of telling him so?

"There's every reason why you should say yes. We'll be married very quietly—it can be done to-morrow if you like: I've already spoken to Strangeways our chaplain about it——"

"What?" cried Ruth, wheeling round and facing him indignantly. "You've had the impertinence to tell Mr. Strangeways you were going to marry me without having previously asked my consent?"

"No, no; nothing of the kind. Of course, I

didn't mention your name. I only told him I had hopes—and so I have, in spite of what you say—of being married, and that the marriage might come off quickly. I've already obtained leave of absence, and directly I reach England I shall sell my commission, retire, and we shall take our position in English society among the best people. Perhaps I shall go into Parliament. Look here——”

He came nearer, and casting his eyes round furtively, went on in a low voice :

“I'm going to tell you something. I'm in a position to know that there's trouble ahead in India. It may come soon ; it may come late ; it may blow over, but I'm afraid it won't. Anyhow, Ruth, I'm very anxious about you. I want to be sure that you're out of danger, and to be on the safe side, you—that is we—ought to leave Cawnpore at once. If we delay, the country may become unsettled, and we may have some difficulty in reaching Calcutta. I wouldn't have mentioned this for fear of alarming you, but you force me to it because you evidently think I'm not sincere. I love you, darling, so much that, sooner than a hair of your head should be injured, I'd——”

“I beg you to say no more,” interposed Ruth hotly. “Every word you utter puts you in a more odious light. I'm shocked to hear you talking of sneaking away directly there's danger. If trouble's coming it's your duty to stay and face it.”

“Of course—of course,” he stammered confusedly, for the word “sneak ” cut him like a

lash. "I wasn't speaking of myself, but of you."

"Of me," she cried with infinite scorn. "You seem to forget that my father was a soldier, and that he died facing the enemy. I don't think we need prolong our talk, Captain Kendrick. I wish you good evening."

Kendrick's face was white with rage and mortification. He stood still, quite unable to make any reply. Then as she was passing him his mind quickened, and he strode hastily in front of her.

"One moment, Miss Armitage," he cried. "I . . . don't want you to go away with a false impression. I didn't speak the truth in what I said just now about 'trouble.' I thought perhaps a—a sense of danger would induce you to say yes if only to—to get away from Cawnpore, you know. Of course I was wrong. I ought to have known you were too plucky. But I don't think you'll be very angry now that you know what was really in my mind."

Kendrick's explanation, Ruth considered, did not make the matter much better. At the same time, she was relieved to find that there was nothing to fear. Stories of the disturbances at Berhampore and Barrackpore had reached the residents in a modified form, and the majority were not much disturbed. They thought that the discontent was purely local, and that the military authorities were fully able to deal with any difficulty. But Howard Kendrick had used the words "trouble ahead" with such emphasis,

that for the moment she felt quite uneasy. Uneasiness, however, had now given place to anger with the discovery that Kendrick had been trying to play upon her fears.

"You've done a mean thing," she cried vehemently. "I don't think any more of you, Captain Kendrick, because you've confessed to a falsehood."

"Perhaps not," said he, whiter "an ever, and his voice trembling with passion. "Anyway, may I ask you to keep our conversation a secret between us, especially that part relating to what you call my—my falsehood?"

"Well, and wasn't it one?"

Her glance was fixed fearlessly on his face. His eyes could not meet hers. They drooped, and he seemed overwhelmed with confusion. He did not answer, and his silence and disturbed manner raised strange suspicions in her mind. Her old uneasiness came back.

"How do I know that what you said in your attempt to frighten me isn't really true?" she exclaimed. "Tell me have you really heard anything disquieting? You need not hesitate about speaking frankly. I'm not likely to scream or faint."

"I know you won't do either," Kendrick forced himself to say. "I swear to you there's not the least cause for alarm. That's why I ask you to forget my foolishness. If it got about that I had said anything to you, why, it might come back to me, and I hardly know how I could explain, without bringing your name in."

"You needn't trouble. I am not likely to talk about you behind your back."

Ruth said this in the coldest and most distant manner, and swept out of the room, leaving Howard Kendrick gnawing his lower lip, and looking like a man who had been thoroughly chastised.

Kendrick was in no mood to meet Mrs. Waring. He would have to explain how he had been repulsed, and this repulse was too recent to be regarded calmly. He stalked out, climbed into his buggy, and drove back to his bungalow.

"I'll follow Heron's example," he muttered savagely, "and be suddenly taken ill. I've already leave of absence, and illness will naturally hasten my departure."

He was received by a string of servants, and contrary to his usual contemptuous indifference, he looked searchingly at them. As a rule, when he spoke to a native he accompanied his orders with highly ornamental epithets, sometimes in English, sometimes in Hindustani, and not infrequently with the addition of a kick or a cuff. His present scrutiny did not reveal anything different from the ordinary obsequious demeanour, and he entered the bungalow with an air of relief.

His first act was to send a note to head-quarters excusing himself from dinner, on account of indisposition. Then he went through the letters which had arrived while he was away. They were all of the same nature—pressing demands from creditors, who had heard that he was in funds, and had paid his debts of honour. They

were, in consequence, eager to have their bills settled. Kendrick flung the tiresome letters away with an oath.

He went into the verandah, and gave his chokadars instructions not to admit any visitors, as the Sahib was unwell, and could see no one. After this he shut himself in his bedroom, mixed a brandy-and-soda, and threw himself on his bed to think out his plan of action.

"It would have been jolly pleasant to have had that little girl as a companion during the journey," he muttered. "She was a fool not to say yes. I meant to act square. I'd sounded old Strangeways, and he was all right. He'd have married us in two twos, and my marriage would have suited the governor's book to rights. It's what he was always hammering at before we split."

Kendrick tried to keep his disappointment on the surface of his mind, but deep down was a cankering thought which persisted in surging upwards. This thought had to do with his visit to the Bithoor Palace, when, taking Azimoolah's hint, he had adroitly flattered the Nana and had depreciated his own country's strength and resources. Of course the talk between the two sounded like the idlest gossip. True, the Nana spoke once or twice about his rights which the English Government refused to acknowledge, but he showed no resentment—indeed, he appeared to regard the matter as one which it would be hopeless to revive, and madness to attempt to assert by force.

Kendrick's conscience pricked him, and he

went over his conversation with the Maharajah point by point, and told himself he could find nothing which could be said to suggest definitely that the Nana contemplated any act of rebellion. But why the princely gift of which Kendrick found himself the recipient?

Argue as sophistically as he might, Kendrick could not forget the exceptionally oiliness of the Nana's voice and manner, and his eager questions as to the present condition of England, after the strain of the Crimean war—an oiliness contrasting ominously with the unusual glitter in his dull eyes, when his visitor answered the questions in a way to justify the opinion held by hosts of the natives, that England was depopulated, and that nearly all that was left of her army was in India.

Again, why was Azimoolah so anxious for Kendrick to conciliate the Nana in so singular a fashion? Azimoolah had no particular love for Kendrick. His feelings as a rule were rather the reverse, as Kendrick knew well enough. Why should the ex-khitmutgar go out of his way to put money into Kendrick's pocket, simply for an hour's talk with, and flattery of the Nana?

Another matter for Kendrick to ponder over was the attitude of the Nana's retinue, and of the crowds of hangers on. It was suspicious, to say the least, and Kendrick had not failed to take heed of it. Bithoor Palace swarmed with a lazy, disreputable hoard, who were paid four rupees a month, and had a suit given them once a year. These scoundrels were little better than the scum of the bazaars, and found excitement

whenever they were so minded in plundering and blackmailing. The ruffians were, as a rule, cringing enough to their master's English friends, but they were certainly not cringing to Kendrick on the occasion of his last visit. Many of them did not salaam, and others laughed and made jokes, evidently at the expense of the visitor.

All this seemed corroborative of the reports brought by Hurst from Benares as to the growing insolence of the native servants. There might be nothing in it, but Kendrick's duty was to lay the matter before his superiors. But how could he without disclosing all the circumstances? He dared not let out that he had had a large sum placed at his disposal by the Nana, especially as he had allowed it to be understood that his recent accession of wealth had come from his father.

Howard Kendrick not only could not run straight, but was a cur at heart, and in these two miserable facts lay the groundwork of all his actions. He was hated by the sepoys under his command, and he was well aware of that hatred. If there should be any rising like that at Barrackpore, he would be one of the first against whom the men would turn. Apart from the talk with the Nana, the mutterings he had overheard among his company made him all the more inclined to believe that clouds were gathering. As Ruth had shrewdly surmised, he had spoken the truth, when he told her trouble was ahead, and secretly he had resolved to leave Cawnpore as soon as he could.

And never would he come back. He believed

in his power to talk his father over. A marriage with Ruth would have helped him considerably, but as she refused, he would have to manage without her. For the next three days he kept indoors. Of course the regimental doctor came to see him, but it was easy to get on with Dr. Rogers, who was a different type of man from Steinton, and only cared for brandy pawnee.

In the meantime, having nothing to do but drink and smoke, Howard Kendrick found himself at the end of these three days ill in reality. To say the truth, he was on the verge of delirium tremens.

In the meantime there had been a little scene between Ruth and Mrs. Waring. The lady with "nerves" could easily fly into a passion, and she stormed at the girl for what she called her foolishness in refusing Howard Kendrick. She tried to bring her husband into the matter; and when she found the Colonel was inclined to side with Ruth, she turned her batteries of wrath upon one of the best natured of men. A little craft was beneath this display of anger. She anticipated opposition from her husband to her journey to the Hills, on account of the expense, and having contrived to work herself into a hysterical fit, with prostration to follow, the poor Colonel was only too glad to unloose his purse strings for the sake of peace and quietness.

It so happened that a family of some position in Cawnpore were in the same mind as Mrs. Waring, and it was arranged that the latter should travel with them. It was the 1st of May when the party set out, never dreaming

when they bade their many friends farewell, that they would never see each other again.

In the beginning of May a deceptive calm rested upon the Central and North-Western provinces of India. There was no sign of discontent; the bazaars were as crowded as ever, and trade went merrily on, men going about their avocations with apparent unconcern. Yet all this time hundreds of Azimoolah's emissaries—moolvies (travelling pilgrims), pedlars, goojurs or robbers, barbers, basket-makers, water-carriers, grass-cutters, mendicants, and nondescripts of every variety, were quietly spreading rebellion and promising golden rewards to all who rose against the yoke of John Company and the redcoats.

June 23, the centenary of Clive's victory, which led to the conquest of India, was to be the day of a simultaneous rising. But events shaped themselves otherwise. The impatience of the conspirators at Meerut and Delhi precipitated the crisis. But for this, the story of the Indian Mutiny, terrible as it was, might have been very much worse.

CHAPTER IX

A DANGER SIGNAL

It was the 12th of May. The day had been one of excessive heat even for the hottest month in the year in India. From morn till night punkahs had been kept swinging, without making much apparent difference in the stifling atmosphere. The English residents were limp and nerveless, the natives moved silently, stealthily.

The welcome sunset came, and the fiery red of the western sky changed to a bluish, opalescent tint. With the cool evening, life seemed to return to the exhausted Europeans. Lights began to appear here and there; the whirr of myriads of insects was heard; carriages containing ladies dressed in the height of fashion rattled by; and the "Street of Silver" was crowded with sauntering natives, their white clothing looking ghostly in the pale light.

One of the principal bungalows in the outskirts was brilliantly illuminated. From the open windows came the sound of a piano, and of a girlish voice sweet and clear. The song was a simple one, a popular ballad in the fifties. It would be called slow and sickly sentimental nowadays, but at that time it was listened to with delight.

This evening it was destined to cause a sensation. The singer had nearly reached the end of the third verse when the voice trembled, the birdlike tones ceased, and suddenly she burst into tears. A lady with a kindly face immediately went to the girl, who had risen from the piano, her breast heaving convulsively, her eyes moist and shining.

"Dearest Ruth," whispered the lady soothingly, "come with me and sit in the verandah. The cool air will refresh you. This terribly suffocating day has been too much for your nerves."

The girl made no reply. She had repressed her sobs, and allowed her friend, Mrs. Ewart, to lead her through the French windows to the bamboo chairs outside.

The incident, trifling as it was, threw a sadness over the party, though, to be sure, they were not in particularly high spirits before it happened. Still, they did their best to drive away the feeling of gloom. Colonel Waring, tall, soldierly, erect as a dart, just then entered with an open newspaper in his hand.

"Good news," said he cheerily. "*The Bombay Gazette* has just come. Here is what it says: 'India is quiet throughout.' We've been alarming ourselves without a cause."

"What is the date of the paper?" asked one of the party, Standridge, the Deputy-Commissioner.

"May 1st," was the Colonel's reply.

"Eleven days ago. Much may have happened since then," retorted the Deputy-Commissioner.

"Don't take such a pessimistic view of things, Standridge," returned Colonel Waring a little sharply. Then looking round the room he noticed Ruth's absence, and asked where she was. He was told what had occurred, and he went into the verandah.

"You're not ill, I hope, Ruth my dear?" he inquired with concern.

"No, indeed. I'm much better now. I don't know how I came to break down. I suddenly felt sad and nervous and—and something in the music—I can't tell you what it was—oppressed me."

"I think she's all right now, Colonel Waring," said Mrs. Ewart.

"Are you sure?" The old soldier looked anxiously at the girl's white face. Ruth seemed very fragile at that moment; she had crept close to the lady as though to seek her protection from some indefinable danger.

"I'm half sorry I didn't postpone this little party, especially as Mrs. Waring is away," went on the Colonel, taking a seat on the other side of Ruth. "It seems to me we are none of us in the humour for pleasuring. Yet it would have been absurd to put it off. It isn't Ruth's fault that to-day she's twenty-one," he continued, smiling pleasantly.

"I don't see you've any occasion for regret," said Mrs. Ewart. "It's true we're all a little troubled; but the clouds will soon pass away. Don't you think so?"

"Yes; no doubt—no doubt."

But the Colonel spoke in rather a half-hearted

manner. Perhaps Ruth's attack of indisposition had depressed him.

"Have you heard how Mrs. Waring is progressing on her journey?" said Mrs. Ewart presently, by way of breaking an embarrassing silence.

"Oh yes. The party she's travelling with have been very lucky. In spite of the irregularity of the dak service they managed to secure conveyances, and, of course, when they reach Raneegunge they'll take the railway, and there'll be no more difficulty."

"A good many people have been leaving, I'm told," continued Mrs. Ewart. "I don't think they're doing a wise thing. My husband doesn't believe there's the slightest danger."

"I know Colonel Ewart's opinions thoroughly. I only hope he's right," said Waring hastily.

Colonel Ewart, of the 51st Native Infantry, was one who had faith in the fidelity of the troops until towards the end of May, when his views altered.

Meanwhile Ruth sat with her head resting lightly on Mrs. Ewart's shoulder, and her hand in that of her sympathetic friend. Her tears had ceased, and her large, dark, tender eyes were gazing thoughtfully into the night.

"You're better now?" said Mrs. Ewart.

"Oh yes, thank you," she murmured.

The moon was rising, and soon the whole landscape would be flooded with a pure soft light, and all things be as visible as in the day. There was an enclosure in front of the bungalow prettily laid out with shrubs and flowers. Be-

yond could be seen the moving forms of natives. It was light enough to see that many were sepoys.

Colonel Waring rose, and was saying he would tell his guests that nothing serious ailed Ruth, when a harsh, raucous voice was heard in the distance. The Colonel stood and listened. An uneasy expression stole over his face.

"What's the meaning of that? What's the fellow calling out? Can either of you ladies distinguish the words?"

But neither could, and the Colonel came to the conclusion that some drunken fellow was creating a disturbance. Soon a man came in sight. He was tall and gaunt, he had long white hair and beard, and was walking very rapidly. He looked neither to the right nor left, and he did not seem to be drunk, for he kept a straight line in the centre of the road. The people fell back to allow him to pass. The little group in the verandah of the bungalow watched him till, turning round by a large building, he was lost to view.

Whatever this man had been shouting, it had the effect of stopping the traffic for some little time. The natives crowded together; they were seen to be talking earnestly and gesticulating. What did it mean?

"Strange that none of us could make out what the fellow was saying," muttered the Colonel uneasily. "I'd better send Jhundoo to inquire."

Jhundoo was the colonel's confidential servant, and a man who had always been found trustworthy.

For some days indefinable, mysterious, and alarming apprehensions had prevailed in Cawnpore. Many had fears they could not combat, that something dreadful was impending, but none could suggest grounds for such a supposition. There certainly was nothing definite. The native troops went about their duties in the usual way, and even the uncomfortable greased cartridge question appeared to have subsided. But the cloud of doubt and uneasiness refused to disperse.

Ruth and Mrs. Ewart sat quietly talking, awaiting the return of the Colonel. One or two of the ladies came into the verandah to inquire after Ruth, and finding her quiet and composed went back to the room, and the music was resumed. In a quarter of an hour Colonel Waring returned, but he did not go into the verandah; he remained talking with the officers who were of the party.

"Let us go to the Colonel," said Ruth suddenly. "I don't know why, but I feel terribly anxious."

She and Mrs. Ewart entered the room and threaded their way among the guests, Ruth being stopped every now and then to answer friendly inquiries as to her health. At last they reached Colonel Waring.

"What does Jhundeosay?" whispered Ruth anxiously.

"Oh, he was told the fellow was a religious fanatic. Don't think any more about it," rejoined Colonel Waring, with an air of indifference.

Ruth was not deceived. In the time of danger woman's perception is quickened, and the girl could see a suggestion of anxiety under the Colonel's apparent carelessness.

"Dear Colonel Waring," she continued entreatingly, "I don't believe you're telling me all that Jhundoo said."

"My dear child, I've told you all that's necessary," he answered with unwonted gravity.

"No, you haven't. Something's on your mind. Do you suppose I'm afraid? Have you forgotten who was my father?"

Her words seemed to strike a tender chord in the old man's heart.

"You're right," he returned in a low voice. "I can trust you, my dear, but this isn't the place to tell you much. I don't want to create a scare. All I can say is that the fellow we heard shouting is a messenger of evil. Jhundoo would only tell me as much as this. Whether he knows more, and is keeping it back, I can't say."

"Then the messenger has brought bad news?"

"No. He simply uttered one word, which means that the people are to prepare themselves for something. But it may be utterly meaningless. You know what these Indian fanatics are."

This conversation took place near the door where Colonel Waring and Ruth were standing, they having withdrawn a little from the rest in order to talk quietly, and the Colonel had hardly finished speaking, when Ruth's ayah was seen approaching hurriedly. The girl's eyes

looked wild and terror stricken. She whispered something to Ruth, who, without answering, turned and repeated to Colonel Waring what the girl said. Then the three went out together. Colonel Waring and Ruth were absent about ten minutes. On their return both were disturbed in looks and manner. A hush fell upon the company when the Colonel strode into the centre of the room.

"Dear friends," said the old soldier in a low, deep voice, and speaking very slowly, "the brother of Miss Arncliffe's ayah has just arrived from Delhi, with terrible—very terrible—news. The troops have mutinied, and have taken possession of the city. They have been joined by rebels from Meerut, where, I fear, disaster has also happened. I, but of this the man could tell me nothing. I've sent Captain Angelo to Sir Hugh Wheeler to ascertain if he also has heard anything. The whole thing's so frightful that I hope there may be some mistake."

All listened with breathless, with painfully strained attention. Fright was written in every woman's face, and one poor old lady gasped hysterically "My son's in Delhi," and burying her face in her hands, sobbed aloud.

A strange light had leaped to the eyes of the men. Their faces were set and stern. If the intelligence were true, their own lives might ere long be in danger, and as for their wives, their sisters, their daughters, their sweethearts—oh, it was heart-rending to think of.

All that could be done in that agonising moment was to hope for the best. The men

tried to restore the courage of the women and comfort them, and it was pitiful to see how the latter struggled to keep calm. Meanwhile Colonel Waring and his brother officers conferred together as to the best course to take in the event of the bad news being confirmed.

At last Angelo returned. Men and women pressed round him. There was no need to ask questions. His sad face told the tidings.

"The news is too true," he said simply—"and worse. It is feared that many of our friends are dead."

He could with truth have said butchered, but he softened his language for the sake of the women. Then he turned to Colonel Waring, and told him that the General wished to see him at once. There was to be a meeting of the officers at head-quarters. The party was hastily broken up. Those men who were not soldiers left with their wives and daughters, and saw other ladies to their homes. But several of the women stayed behind; they were anxious to know what General Wheeler would do. Among those who remained was Mrs. Ewart. Ruth was very fond of her, and the two sat hand in hand through a weary two hours.

Then the sound of feet was heard outside. Colonel Waring and the other officers had returned. Their calm demeanour soothed the agitation of the ladies. They had thoroughly discussed the position with the General, and all had come to the conclusion that no immediate danger was to be apprehended.

"Our troops will reach Delhi in a few days,

and these rascals will receive such a lesson as they have never had before," said Colonel Waring.

This was Waring's firm conviction, as it was the conviction also of the vast majority of his brother officers; but despite his confidence that all was well, and that there were no signs of disaffection among the troops, the night was an anxious one, and all were glad to see the sun rise upon the undisturbed and placid streets.

Although there was nothing like a panic, several of the Europeans prepared to leave the station. Some set out for Agra, travelling by *dâk*, despite the rumour that a very large body of thieving *goojurs* were coming down from Delhi. Others hired boats, and ordered them to be kept in readiness, intending to leave for Allahabad directly there was the slightest sign of an outbreak. The more timid did not wait for this, but departed at once for Calcutta.

The European officers and soldiers were kept continually on the alert. They, whatever might be their lot, would have to stick to their posts, and their wives and families must share their fate. But not one uttered a murmur.

CHAPTER X

AZIMOOLAH SHOWS HIS HAND

A WEEK went over since the news of the mutiny at Meerut reached Cawnpore, and most of the English here thought the native soldiers would remain loyal. Yet there were many sinister and unfortunate incidents. Ill-luck, indeed, seemed to hover over the English, for it so happened that a large supply of wheaten flour arrived by boat from the upper Ganges, and was sold off very cheaply. The flour was old and musty, and disagreeable in flavour. Instantly a rumour spread, that the British Government, wishing to break down the caste of the natives, had purposely sent down this flour, mixed up with the ground bones of cows and pigs.

On the 19th the European residents were seized with a vague and indefinable alarm. No one knew what to do, and no one could ascertain what cause there was for apprehension. Yet there were plenty of rumours. One was that mutiny was about to break out; another, that the "goojurs" from Delhi were coming to plunder Cawnpore.

What added to the general disquietude was that there was no place for safety. The officers

and military residents had previously removed to new and partly finished barracks to the east of the Ganges Canal, for the reason that the native infantry were stationed there. The building of these barracks—not brick buildings, such as we see in England, but a series of huts, each man having his own, where he lodged his family—was unfortunate. The sepoy's grumbled at having to change to incomplete buildings, while those they had vacated were standing empty. It was a grievance that they were not allowed to remain in their old quarters until the new ones were quite ready. Excepting in regard to position, the military were well provided for, but the only shelter for civilians was the magazine on the banks of the river. This building had a high wall round it, and a spacious compound, with several large, roomy buildings, and was suitable for refuge; but then it was a long distance—five miles—from the new native infantry cantonments just mentioned, and the general did not think it safe to leave the troops to themselves at so great a distance. So for the moment should there be an outbreak, it was quite uncertain what the residents would do.

A deputation of merchants waited upon General Wheeler to ask his advice. The General was of opinion that there was no immediate cause for alarm, but suggested that every non-military man should arm himself. As for the ladies and children, they might take shelter in two long barracks within the city. This the civilians did not think satisfactory; but they resolved, in case of any sudden danger, that if there was

not time to go to the barracks, they would assemble in the shop of Mr. Hay, one of the principal merchants. In the meantime, Sir Hugh Wheeler was making his preparations by ordering an earth wall to be thrown up round some of the new barracks near the quarters of the native infantry, never dreaming that by so doing he was sealing the doom of his countrymen and women.

For two days Ruth had not left the house, but in the cool of the evening of the 20th she was tempted to stroll with her ayah beyond the compound. They passed a group of soldiers, and Ruth noticed that they had not their customary quiet and respectful demeanour. They were talking and laughing loudly. They glanced boldly and impudently at her, and she resolved to return to the bungalow at once. But before she did so, she observed a curious circumstance. Something was being passed from one to another. To Ruth it appeared to be a leaf. Every member of a group handled this, whatever it was; then it was taken to the next group, and the same process was gone through. Clearly it meant some secret sign. She asked the ayah if she could explain, but the ayah either did not know or would not say.

Greatly troubled, Ruth hurried back, and to her relief found that Colonel Waring had just come in from General Wheeler. She at once told him what she had seen. The troubled look which crept into his face frightened her.

"Ruth, my dear," said he slowly, "the time we have all dreaded has come. You must make

instant preparations for moving to the cantonments. Not a moment is to be lost. What you saw was the passing of the lotus leaf. The same thing was noticed before the insubordination at Barrackpore, and before the outbreak at Meerut. My dear girl, I fear the worst! It will be a hard time for all of us. But don't meet troubles half way. We shall pull through all right. I'm glad—very glad my wife went away."

Ruth, curious to know the significance of the passing of the lotus leaf, put some questions about it. She had heard about the passing of the chupatty, but the lotus leaf was new to her.

"I can't explain exactly what the difference is," returned the Colonel hastily. "The fact is, no one knows the meaning of these distributions save that they imply a secret signal of some kind. The lotus is only used among the soldiers, for the ordinary natives the chupatty is employed. I've been told that the passing of the chupatty is not necessarily an ill-omen, but has its origin in some vow. It's all very well to say that, but to my mind it doesn't make the matter any better—it all depends upon the nature of the vow. But don't let your thoughts dwell upon the thing, child. India is full of puzzles, and some of these puzzles when their significance is discovered are childish enough."

Then the Colonel, with a look of preoccupation on his face, hurried away, leaving Ruth to puzzle out the meaning of the mystery and romance conveyed in his words as best she could. The lotus had always attracted her, and she had been

content to admire the gigantic leaf, smooth and shining, the tall and quivering stem, and the majesty with which it towered above its humbler companions; but after Colonel Waring's words, the blood-red flowers of the variety grown in Bengal seemed to have a sinister aspect. Ruth's ayah, who was full of Hindoo traditions, had told her how the lotus was the symbol of the great god Vishnu, who in many of the temples is represented as seated upon the lotus in the midst of waters. The flower was dedicated to Laksmi, the wife of Vishnu; it was regarded by the Hindoos as an emblem of the world, the whole plant signifying both the earth and its two principles of fecundation. It was a favourite offering at the temples, and its poetic side was the legend that the red lotus was dyed by the blood of Siva, that flowed from the wound inflicted by the arrow of Kavina, the Indian god of love. The ayah was never tired of repeating love-stories in which the lotus figured in all the wealth of Oriental imagery.

Ruth was pondering troublously on the lotus and its associations, when her thoughts were rudely broken into by guttural voices heard from without. The hoarse sounds were at first like the distant roar of an angry sea. Then they rose to shrill shouts, to sink afterwards to sullen whispers. Ruth dared not go into the verandah to find out the cause of the disturbance, but ran agitatedly in search of the Colonel. She found him buckling on his sword.

"Don't be alarmed," said he quietly. "I'm going to see what this hubbub means."

"No, no," cried the girl, with a sudden burst of fear. "You must not go!"

"Nonsense; it's my duty! Besides, I'm convinced there's no actual danger. I believe the troops in Cawnpore are thoroughly faithful, and will resist the attempts which are being made to corrupt them. I'd stake my existence on the loyalty of my own regiment."

"Yes, yes; I know that the men love you—and so they ought; but who can tell what may happen when——"

She stopped. The room was suddenly illumined by a dull, reddish light.

Quickly disengaging himself from the frightened girl, Colonel Waring hastened out of the room to the compound. The sky in the direction of the lines of the 1st Native Infantry was broken by the glare of fire, with here and there tongues of flame shooting upwards. It was from this quarter that the sounds of voices were proceeding. Crushing her fears Ruth ran into the veranda.

The moon was shining brightly. The whole landscape was flooded with a pale, silver light, save where the fire had broken out. Ruth could see yellow flames and myriads of red sparks in the midst of clouds of smoke. The fire, she thought, was not spreading, indeed, short as the time was since its outbreak, it seemed already to be dying down.

All at once the girl was seized with a disquieting sensation that she was not alone. Yet she could not see any one, for the panic-stricken servants had fled, nobody could say whither. Suddenly, though she had heard no footstep, not

even the rustle of a garment, she saw a man standing close to her—so close, indeed, that he had but to stretch his arm, to touch her. She involuntarily recoiled, as much through the sudden and mysterious appearance of the man as by the personality of the man himself.

She recognised Azimoolah Khan, the treasurer, the right hand, the governing spirit of Nana Sahib. The Hindoos called him the Nana's *rakeel*. Despite his courtly and insinuating manners, Ruth hated the man.

"I have not frightened you, I trust, Miss Armitage," said he in his smooth, oily voice, and with a deferential inclination of his head.

"No," Ruth answered coldly. "Still, I should prefer to have had your coming announced."

"Ah! there is no time for ceremony."

"What do you mean?"

In spite of her desire not to appear timid before Azimoolah, she could not prevent her voice trembling slightly.

"I dare not tell you all. I can only say that I have come here to save you. Before many days are over, something terrible will happen. You know, perhaps, what has taken place at Meerut, and Delhi, and Futtehpore——"

"Futtehpore?" cried the girl. "No bad news has come from Futtehpore. Why, it was but the other day that the Oudh Cavalry were marched there, and Lieutenant Ashe, with a battery, was ordered to follow yesterday."

"Lieutenant Ashe will get there too late. The Oudh Cavalry have murdered their officers. Captain Hayes and Captain Carey are dead."

Azimoolah bent his head and whispered the words in her ear.

All the blood seemed to rush to Ruth's heart, and leave the surface of her body icy cold. It was only within the last few days she had met both Hayes and Carey at a dance given by Lady Wheeler. They were then full of life and gaiety; and now—but she could not think of the contrast. It was too appalling.

"You tremble, Miss Armitage," continued the Mussulman, in a soft, purring voice. "It is only natural; but you at least have nothing to fear if you trust me. At Bithoor shelter and safety await you. Nay, if Colonel Waring chooses to avail himself of the Nana's hospitality, as he and his friends have often done before, he is welcome."

The man's words roused all the girl's spirit. She could only look upon an invitation to Nana Sahib's palace at Bithoor as an insult. The Nana was rarely visited by English ladies.

"Go back to your master, Azimoolah Khan, and tell him I desire neither his friendship nor his shelter. I mistrust both."

"Aha," said he, "you are not like the English officers, Miss Armitage; they trust the Nana. Has he not offered to General Wheeler his assistance to guard the treasury at Nawabgunge?"

"I heard so," returned Ruth hurriedly; "but it makes no difference in my opinion."

"Think well before you refuse," said Azimoolah Khan slowly, and with emphasis. "You know not what is coming. England is growing weaker; we in India are becoming stronger."

You have taught us to use your weapons, you have shown us how you conquered our land, and we may turn the lesson to good account."

"This comes well from you, Azimoolah Khan," she cried, with indignation. "You have been in England, and you know something of us. You, like Nana Sahib, have always said you were friendly to the English."

"Yes, I have said so," interposed the Mussulman smoothly.

"Why then do you not exert yourself to influence your countrymen?"

"It is useless. Who can fight against the decrees of fate? When the floodgates of passion, of revenge——"

"Revenge! What have you to revenge? What have we done?"

"Oh, I only put the case as thousands look at it. For myself, I have received many kindnesses from English men, and from"—he laughed sily—"English women too. But I am powerless. I know what is in store for your countrymen in India, Miss Armitage. They will be driven into the 'black water.' Not a soul will remain on Indian soil. But I would save those of the English whom I love, and that is why I beg you to come with me while there's yet time."

"Come—with you?" repeated Ruth slowly, and as though she had not heard aright.

"It is your only chance of life—of *life*, remember. Before long even I may not be able to save you."

He was now quite close to her. He would have grasped her wrist, but she retreated. She

was seized with an uncontrollable horror of this man, with his velvety voice and snake-like manner. Yet she had heard women—English women—talk admiringly of his fascinations.

"My answer is, No!" she cried. "Not even to save my life would I go to Bithoor."

"Very well then, there is another way," said he rapidly. "The Nana shall not know that you have refused his offer. I will charge myself with your safety. You need not go to Bithoor. Come to the river. I have a boat in readiness, and I will take you to Allahabad."

"No. Come when Colonel Waring is here, and talk to him."

"Colonel Waring? What can he do? Maybe you'll never see him again."

There was something in his tone which set her nerves vibrating, her senses on the alert.

"Ah, I see," she cried. "This is a trick—it is treachery! If anything happens to Colonel Waring it will be at your instigation."

"How unjust you are, Miss Armitage. Is it possible I could wish harm to any friend of *yours*? Ah, Miss Armitage——"

He stopped suddenly. His quick ear had caught the sound of a footstep. It had the effect upon him of an electric shock. He clapped his hands sharply. Instantly the gardens became alive with dusky forms running from behind the thickets.

"You see I have laid my plans," hissed Azimoolah.

The next moment Ruth was surrounded by his followers—some of the worst of the many

ruffians in the pay of the Nana. But it was only for a second.

"You scoundrels—you devils," shouted an English voice, and right and left went a couple of the budmash to the ground, felled like bullocks. Fright seized the rest; they took to their heels, and apparently Azimoolah among them, for he was nowhere to be seen.

Ruth, white as a lily, and trembling from head to foot, found herself faced by Dick Heron, flushed and panting. He had his revolver in readiness, but he had not fired it for fear of hitting Ruth: now, however, he sent a bullet after the fugitives.

"Thank God I'm in time," cried Dick brokenly. "The villains haven't hurt you, have they?"

"No, Dick. I——"

She could say no more. To hear himself called by the old name of their days of friendship, sent Dick's heart bounding. It was as much as he could do to explain that, hearing of the disturbance, he had sprung from his bed, leaped on a horse, half dressed as he was, and had galloped straight to Colonel Waring's bungalow.

"How good of you, Dick—and you so ill too," cried Ruth, clasping her hands.

"That's nothing. I'm nearly well. I met the Colonel, and he told me to hurry here and take you to General Wheeler's entrenchment. The bungalows in the cantonments aren't safe any longer, for you and the other ladies."

"But what has happened? Is Colonel Waring——?"

She could not continue. Azimoolah's ominous words were fresh in her mind.

He's quite safe ; but he's unable to come to you just now. Don't be alarmed. The fire's almost extinguished. It broke out in the lines of the 1st Native Infantry. Our fellows ran down six guns, and I guess the sight was enough. Anyhow, the men are obeying orders, and it may be the fire was accidental. In the hubbub, Colonel Waring was struck by a stone—oh it's nothing much. I assure you——”

“The poor Colonel !” cried Ruth agitatedly. “I must go to him at once. You'll take me, won't you ?”

She turned her swimming eyes imploringly upon the lad. He longed to kiss her tears away.

“I can't,” said he quickly. “The Colonel's orders are imperative. I wasn't to lose a moment in escorting you to the entrenchment. There's all the more reason to hurry after what happened just now. I thought I saw that slimy scoundrel Azimoolah among the mob who were round you. Was I right ?”

“Yes—but——”

“The first time I meet the rascal I'll give him the soundest thrashing man ever had. But we won't talk about him. Run indoors and get a few things together. You may want them.”

There was an air of authority about Dick Heron, which sat well on the lad. Ruth never liked him so much as now. She obeyed without a word, and returned in about ten minutes, accompanied by her ayah, who was carrying a light portmanteau. Dick Heron took Ruth's

arm and they set out to walk to the cantonments. The latter were quite distinct from the city, and were spread over an extent of six miles in a semicircular form along the banks of the Ganges.

The three reached the border of the cantonments without anything untoward happening. They were now in a road bordered by trees. Before them lay the plain, and they could see in the distance the wall of sandy earth which had been hastily thrown up, forming the entrenchment.

"Five minutes' walk beyond those trees," said Dick encouragingly, "and we shall be inside the——"

At that moment a musket was fired not four yards from them. Then came a piercing scream from her ayah, and Ruth felt Dick's grasp suddenly relax. She turned swiftly, but was unable to save him from falling. He was lying at her feet motionless, and blood was trickling down his cheek. The next moment she was kneeling on the ground, holding Dick Heron's wrist.

"I can feel no pulse," she cried piteously. "Oh if——"

Her words died away in a mournful cry. She could see nothing, think of nothing but the poor lad so treacherously struck down. She was unconscious of the gleaming eyes, the cruel pouting lips of the woman who was peering at her through the foliage. But Nadia saw the sinister face and recognised it.

"Hooseinee Khanum!" whispered the ayah

in terror-stricken tones, and in an instant the woman disappeared.

"Come away, Miss Ruth—come away," cried Nadia, shaking from head to foot.

Nadia turned and fled, and Ruth never saw the girl again. She was not long alone, for the sentry on guard at the earthworks had given the alarm, and the picket was hastening towards her, while inside the entrenchment a sudden activity had arisen, for no one could tell that the shot might not be the signal for the attack. The officer in command of the picket knew Ruth, and she told him rapidly what had happened.

"By Jove, this looks like an attempt at assassination from private motives. I don't think it has anything to do with revolt," he returned in a low voice. "Poor Heron! Hard luck to be shot without a chance of defending oneself. Let me take you inside the fort, Miss Armitage. This is no sight for you."

"No no, I won't leave him," she returned doggedly.

The officer allowed her to do as she pleased. The picket improvised a litter, and the unconscious Dick was carried inside the entrenchment, and the surgeon summoned.

"He's not dead," said the doctor. "A narrow shave though. The bullet hasn't entered the skull; it's merely a graze. The lad's a bit run down, that's why he fainted."

It was a relief to hear this, and Ruth allowed herself to be taken to the friends who had preceded her in seeking the shelter of the entrenchment. While sympathising with her, the ladies

could not resist their own feelings of alarm. To what terrible tragedy was this attack destined to be the prelude? So far as they knew, Dick was the first one in Cawnpore to be struck by a hostile bullet. How many would follow? The trembling women dared not ask this question of each other, yet it was in the minds of all.

Morning dawned, and with the bright sun came fresh hope. Nothing had happened within the city, and it was settled that the fire was purely accidental. Ruth hoped and expected to see Colonel Waring, but he sent word that he must remain with his men, as all the other officers were doing.

It was now May 21. At dawn women and children crowded into the barracks, according to orders, and the accommodation began to be limited.

"What the place will be like if the wives and families of the civilians come here too, I can't imagine," said Mrs. Ewart.

"Are they coming, then?" asked Ruth.

"They must. There's no other shelter," answered the lady. "It's a pity the magazine was not chosen instead of this entrenchment; but I suppose General Wheeler had his reasons."

Sir Hugh Wheeler's selection of the spot for his entrenchment has been severely criticised. It was in an exposed situation; its breast-high earthwork provided but a feeble protection, and gave little or no shelter. Moreover, the soil was dry and scrubby, thanks to its being the dry season, and offered little more resistance than a sieve.

On the morning of this day, the sergeant-major's wife of the 53rd, a Eurasian by birth, went marketing to the native bazaar, when she was accosted by a sepoy out of regimental dress.

"You will some of you not come here much oftener," were his sinister words. "You will not be alive another week."

She came back in great alarm, and told Ruth and one or two other ladies; and though they were much frightened they prudently kept the story from the rest, telling only the General what they heard.

"Do not worry yourselves, ladies," said the old General. "I think I know the sepoys as well as any man in India, and you may depend upon it, this is all bombast."

And acting according to his firm belief, General Wheeler visited the lines daily, chatted with the sepoys, and tried to invite their confidence, but could get no certain knowledge of anything like plotting, except in the case of one of the 56th Native Infantry, who was actually given up by some of the sepoys for attempting to spread sedition, and was sentenced to be hanged, though it was considered prudent not to carry out the sentence.

On the 22nd there was a welcome arrival in the shape of a detachment of H.M. 32nd Regiment, sent from Lucknow by the chivalrous Sir Henry Lawrence, though he could ill spare them, and this accession of strength brought confidence with it. As the flight to the hastily-thrown-up entrenchment was having a bad effect on the

sepoys, all who had taken shelter there went back to their homes.

Ruth was very anxious about Dick, but in the hurry and confusion of the removal she did not see him. Perhaps it was as well, for in her agitation of mind she might have revealed her suspicion, namely, that Azimoolah Khan was at the bottom of the attempt to assassinate him.

Meanwhile, though outwardly everything had quieted down, there was an undercurrent of excitement among the troops, so much so that it was not considered advisable to fire the usual salute on the Queen's birthday, May 24. About this date the Nana carried into effect the offer he had made to Sir Hugh Wheeler, which the latter with inconceivable fatuity accepted. This was the "proof" of his friendly disposition towards the English mentioned to Ruth by Azimoolah Khan; and moving to a bungalow near the treasury with about 500 armed men of his own, and two small guns, the Nana took charge of the place and of the treasure. Virtually Sir Hugh had delivered himself into the hands of the rebels; and when, some little time afterwards, he removed into his entrenchment, leaving the magazine, its guns and its stores of ammunition for the benefit of the enemy, he crowned his misplaced confidences with an act of folly for which the infirmity of years—he was seventy-four—is the only excuse.

CHAPTER XI

“FOR GOD’S SAKE SEND US TROOPS!”

QUICK as the voyage was—quick, at least, for those days—it seemed far too slow for Philip Heron’s impatience, and the pilot brigs, tossing to and fro on the crested waves at the mouth of the Hooghly, were to him the most welcome sight in the world.

As soon as the steamer entered the treacherous channel of the river, she took up a pilot, and there was a stoppage for half an hour at Kedgerree, where dispatches from Calcutta were brought on board. Letters were rapidly distributed, and Heron looked with envy at his fellow-passengers, who were eagerly devouring the contents of the epistles written by their expectant friends.

There was no letter for him—how could there be? No one knew he was coming. It is true he had written to Dick on the eve of his departure, but his letter was at that moment lying in a mail-sack which would not be landed until the steamer reached Calcutta. He imagined that his letter would anticipate his arrival at Cawnpore by a few days only.

Heron asked for an Indian newspaper, but there was none to be had. Usually a number of copies were brought to Kedgerree, but not on this

occasion. Others like himself were disappointed, and could not understand the reason. How could they tell that since they had left England, events had followed thick and fast, and that at that very moment Calcutta was convulsed with the news of a disaster in comparison with which the disaffection at Barrackpore and Dum-Dum was a mere trifle? No wonder all the newspapers in Calcutta had been eagerly bought up!

As he paced up and down the deck, watching the various readers, Heron was struck with the fact that the faces of those who had received letters bore the same expression. Everybody was absorbed. Each eye had a strange glitter of suppressed excitement. He passed a group gathered round one man, who was reading his letter aloud. He evidently regarded the contents as public property, and it was no breach of good manners on Heron's part to stop and listen. "At first," wrote the reader's correspondent, "we could not believe the terrible news, and we anxiously looked for a contradiction. But instead of contradiction came confirmation, and the facts are a good deal worse than the rumour. There is no doubt that Colonel Finnis and a number of his officers have been shot by their men. Ladies have also been murdered. How horrible to think of! It seems that nothing was done to stop the progress of the outbreak, and the mutineers rushed away to Delhi, and now hold possession of the city. This Meerut affair occurred on May 11, and the news reached Calcutta three weeks ago. Lord Canning is doing all he can to hurry up reinforcements, for

all kinds of rumours are afloat about the safety of Cawnpore and Lucknow, but there are but few troops here, and travelling is terribly slow. A welcome arrival came two days ago, in the shape of Colonel Neill with his Fusiliers from Madras. We are terribly anxious."

Then the letter passed on to private details.

At first the effect was paralysing. The passengers looked at each other dazed and stunned. Mutiny? Why, it was incredible! Then it seemed slowly to dawn upon them that they had friends and relatives at Meerut, at Delhi, at Allahabad, at Lahore, at Cawnpore, at Lucknow. A lady who was about to join her husband in Delhi burst into tears; another, whose son was an officer stationed at Meerut, fainted. Others, for whom there was no relief in the shape of tears, sat with white, drawn faces—they seemed to have aged ten years in five minutes.

Heron went from one group to another seeking news, but got little beyond what he had heard at first. No one, at all events, could tell him any recent intelligence concerning Cawnpore. The correspondent of one lady, indeed, wrote from Cawnpore, but her letter was dated quite a fortnight before the outbreak at Meerut. Her letter was a mere record of gaiety, concerts, balls, dinner-parties, and a little gossip about the latest scandal. One item, however, interested Heron.

"The new Lucknow Commissioner, Sir Henry Lawrence," wrote the lady, "seems to be a great success. He is immensely popular, and has great influence with the natives. I should think it quite impossible for any disturbance to happen

in Lucknow while Sir Henry is there. I hope he'll be able to help Cawnpore if help is wanted, though that isn't likely. No man in India knows and understands the natives better than he does. Lady Wheeler, you know, is a native of India——"

"No news is good news," thought Heron, and he comforted himself with the reflection that Cawnpore at present appeared to be quite safe, and he tried to interest himself in the scenery on either side of the noble river, for the steamer was now proceeding up the Hooghly as rapidly as the pilot would permit.

The picturesque groves of cocoanuts reached to the water's edge, and their bending boughs threw a grateful shade on the stream. The river was full of native boats of endless variety, some skimming the surface like sea-birds, others hugging the shore and creeping lazily along in the shadow of the trees. Then as the vessel neared Garden Reach the groves of cocoanuts gave place to shrubberies and large stretches of grass-land, beautifully kept. On nearing Calcutta, the progress was very slow, for the centre of the channel, carefully marked out with buoys, had to be strictly kept. Fort William, looking squat and ugly and almost diminutive, was passed, and soon after the steamer was moored.

Heron congratulated himself on his prudence in bringing so little luggage. He was able at once to go ashore with all his belongings. He jumped into a running jetty conveyance, and was taken to an hotel, where he deposited his property. Then he hastened to report himself to Lord Canning at Government House.

Though the hour was so early, the narrow streets were crowded. The air was full of the hum of talk—soft, musical accents, with now and then a shrill laugh. The people, in their snow-white dresses reaching just below the knee, their turbans of varied colours, and their dusky faces looked picturesque to the eye, but in Heron's present frame of mind he regarded them with suspicion.

Just as he emerged from the native quarter, he heard sounds which stirred every nerve in his body. It was the warlike notes of the Highland pipers. Philip Heron had not heard them since that memorable day when Sir Colin Campbell led his brigade up the heights of Alma. Five minutes' walk brought him within sight of a detachment of the 78th Highlanders, in their national dress, marching with that springy, elastic step he had seen and admired so often. Heron had many friends among the 78th, and he could not resist the impulse to run forward and ascertain if he could recognise any of his old chums.

He halted when he was twenty or thirty yards ahead, and waited for the men to approach. On they came like a solid wall. They would pass where Heron was standing by but a couple of yards or so. The first two ranks had scarcely gone by, when he heard his name shouted in a voice which suggested the moors and the heather of Scotland.

"Eh, man! but ye'll be Phil Heron, or may I never know what the taste of whisky is again!"

It was Captain Donald Macintyre, the noisiest, the most reckless, the best-hearted fellow that

ever breathed; a giant in stature, and with hair as fiery as his own nature.

"I'd swear I was Philip Heron, even if that wasn't my name, rather than that your intimate acquaintance with whisky should cease, old fellow," shouted Heron.

"Weel, that's spoken like a friend."

The next moment their hands were clasped.

"And what are ye doing here, man?"

Heron told him in a few breathless words.

"Laddie, ye're the man for us. We start for Raneegunge in two hours. A company of the 64th go with us, just to make the party not too Scottish, ye see," said Macintyre, with a grin. "Now run away to the Government House and see Lord Canning. It's a pity ye're not a Scotsman; but ye're Yorkshire, and that's not so far away from the border."

"But where are ye going?"

"First to Benares, then to Allahabad, then to Cawnpore, and maybe to Lucknow, if we're wanted. Colonel Jack Neill with his 'Lambs'——"

"Colonel Neill?" cried Heron. "Not Colonel Neill who was in the Crimea?"

"The very man. He reached Calcutta a fortnight ago, with nine hundred of his Fusiliers, and they're now on their way. If there's any fighting to be done, Jack Neill's the lad to do it."

Donald Macintyre was quite right. Neill was an Ayrshire man, and the hereditary fierceness of his ancestors still lingered in him. No fitter nature for the task of retribution which he had to perform could be found. He was not one to

temper justice with mercy. Philip Heron remembered him well as an energetic officer of the Turkish contingent in the Crimea. Lord Canning, at his wits' end for troops, had telegraphed to Madras, and Colonel Neill, with "the Lambs," as the 1st Madras Fusiliers were called, and of which he was the commander, lost not one instant in bringing his men up to Calcutta.

"What time do you set out, Macintyre?" asked Heron hurriedly.

"My men are ready now, but the 64th haven't shown up. They only landed yesterday, ye see, from Rangoon. The train's timed to start at six, but I'm thinking we'll not be on the road before eight. I'm dying to see the long face that pock-pudding of a station-master will pull when he finds his blitherin' time-table of nae guid. Eh. What a lesson John Neill gave him! But I'll tell you that another time. Run to his Excellency as fast as your legs can carry ye."

Heron took the kindly Scot's advice. In less than twenty minutes he was at the Government House, waiting for an audience, and impatiently kicking his heels in a waiting-room, together with a dozen men all anxious to see the Governor-General on important business. Luckily, Heron had a letter of introduction from an East India Company's director, also his War Office credentials; and within a quarter of an hour he was admitted to the presence of his Excellency greatly to the chagrin of others who had been waiting a longer time than he had.

Lord Canning's kindly, amiable face looked worn and worried, as well it might, for his

dominion in India was beginning to tremble in the balance. The Governor was in possession of the latest information, and this showed that the rebellion was spreading fast.

The news from the districts north of Allahabad was alarming. Between May 25 and 30 the sepoys at Ferozepoor, Allyghur, Etawah, and Bolundshun had mutinied. Regiments had been disbanded at Lahore, martial law had been proclaimed in the North-west provinces by Mr. Colvin, the Lieutenant-Governor. Great fears were being entertained as to the safety of Cawnpore, Lucknow, and Agra. Delhi was still in the hands of the rebels. Everywhere the cry was, "For God's sake, send troops!"

Only a fortnight before, on May 30, Lord Canning had dispatched this telegram to General Anson, in command of the British forces then besieging Delhi:

"I have heard to-day that you do not expect to be in Delhi before the 9th. In the meantime, Cawnpore and Lucknow are severely pressed, and the country between Delhi and Cawnpore is passing into the hands of the rebels. It is of the utmost importance to prevent this, and to relieve Cawnpore; but nothing but rapid action will do it. Your force of artillery will enable you to dispose of Delhi with certainty; I therefore beg that you will detach one European infantry regiment and a small force of European cavalry to the south of Delhi, without keeping them for operations there, so that Allyghur may be recovered, and Cawnpore relieved immediately. It is impossible to over-rate the importance of

showing European troops between Delhi and Cawnpore. Lucknow and Allahabad depend upon it."

But Lord Canning did not know when he wrote this that General Anson had been dead three days; nor did he conceive that the Mogul capital was not to be so easily disposed of, for instead of being entered on June 9, it was not captured until September 20.

When Philip Heron entered Lord Canning's room, all this was in the impenetrable future. June 9 had come and gone, and Delhi had not been won. The news of General Anson's death had arrived, and also the intelligence that not a single man could be spared. Allahabad, Cawnpore, Lucknow, Benares, were at the mercy of the native army. The outlook was black, and little wonder that Lord Canning was depressed.

"You wish to join Colonel Neill's force?" said he, inquiringly.

"I want to get to Cawnpore as soon as I can, your Excellency," replied Heron. "I have pressing reasons."

"If you join the column you must act under orders. Colonel Neill is to take his men to Cawnpore. No doubt, if Lucknow is in need of help, he will send a detachment there; but I cannot guarantee that you won't be one of the party. There is such a thing as chance, and chance just now seems to dominate everything. It is quite impossible to forecast the future."

Heron had to admit the truth of this. Now that he was face to face with actualities, and could see that rules, regulations, and routine

must be thrown aside in view of the terrible emergencies, it occurred to him that he should carry out his plan of reaching Cawnpore sooner if he were not attached to the force regularly. Might he not volunteer? Lord Canning demurred to this.

"You had better wait till the new Commander-in-Chief, Sir Patrick Grant, arrives. He should be here from Madras with Colonel Havelock in two or three days' time."

Philip Heron had never heard of Colonel Havelock. Few people had in England, beyond the friends of his family and some of his old Carthusian schoolmates. Yet before many weeks were over, the mere mention of the name of Havelock sent a thrill of pride and admiration through the heart of every one, whether rich or poor, who heard it.

"I cannot wait," Heron broke out impatiently. "I have a brother—quite a youngster—in Cawnpore. I can't explain to your lordship my strange yearning to see him and . . . but I mustn't bore you with my private affairs, and can only beg of you to grant my request."

Needless to say that Ruth as well as Dick was in Phil's mind, and it was his anxiety concerning her that gave him the eager manner which impressed Lord Canning, who took a sheet of paper, wrote a few lines, folded and placed the paper in an envelope.

"Take that to Major Stirling, of the 64th. He may be able to accede to your wishes."

Heron warmly thanked the Governor-General, and hurried away to find Major Stirling. The

latter had already left his quarters with his men, and was on the road to the railway station. Heron hastened after him, and found him in conference with a grizzled warrior, the grand old fighting Colonel Walter Hamilton, the commander of the 78th, and better known among his men as "Wattie." Heron waited until the conversation was over, and then, catching old Wattie's eye, saluted him. Heron well remembered the veteran in the Crimea. Wattie remembered him, too, for his eye sparkled, and striding towards Heron, clapped him on the shoulder.

"I ken ye, laddie. Whaur is't that I've seen ye?"

"The last time we met, Colonel, was just after Balaclava. I was being carried to the surgeon when you passed me, and gave me a sup from your whisky-flask."

"Eh, mon, but ye're richt. Gie me your han'."

And the next moment Heron's fingers were clasped with a force that left them bloodless and numbed. "Wattie" was thorough in everything he did.

The encounter was a lucky one, for if Major Stirling had any scruples about accepting Heron's services, the latter knew he should have Colonel Hamilton's good word. And so it proved. The colonel of the Ross-shire Buffs, as the 78th were called, introduced him to the Major, and the matter was arranged.

"We are off in half an hour," said Major Stirling. "You're ready, I suppose?"

"The sooner the better, sir. Yet, with your

permission, I would like to run to my hotel. It's close handy. I shall be back in a quarter of an hour."

The Major nodded. Heron did not think of taking any luggage, but his sword was very precious. It had served him well on the field of Balaclava, and to lose it would be like losing a trusty friend. He rushed to the hotel, secured his sword, a brace of revolvers, and a brandy-flask; asked the landlord to take charge of his portmanteau and trunk, and, if it was his fate never to return, to dispose of them and their contents for his own benefit. Then he hastened to the railway-station.

Heron could only take the clothes in which he stood upright. They were not suitable for the climate, consisting as they did of the ordinary undress uniform of the Hussar regiment to which he belonged. But in this respect he was no worse off than the Highlanders, for they fought every battle of the fierce campaign bearded in their woollen doublets.

Heron found the carriages crowded with men, laughing, talking, and occasionally swearing. But every now and then a fierce, stern look crept into their eyes, telling of the wild yearning in their hearts to avenge the murders at Meerut and Delhi.

Heron was about to enter a carriage when he heard his name yelled out. Macintyre, the Highland red-haired giant, was howling and gesticulating at him three carriages away.

"Come in here!" he shouted. "Shame on us if we can't find room for a Balaclava boy!"

Heron managed to squeeze himself into the closely packed carriage, and the next minute was shaking hands right and left. The 78th and the 64th were mixed up, but, as Macintyre said, they would be able to sort themselves when they got to Ranegunge. Some of the officers of the 64th were in the carriage, and with them Heron speedily made friends.

"See that spalpeen of a station-master?" cried Major Tim Cassidy, pointing to an official who was standing, watch in hand, a little distance away. "It's meself that would like to see him start the thrain before he has his orders."

What had this official done to make himself so objectionable? Heron soon learnt. When Colonel Neill and the first detachment of his "Lambs" arrived, this official had an idea that the time-table of the railway company, and not the suppression of the Mutiny, was the all-important thing. In a very pompous way he went to Neill and told him that if his men were not ready the train must start without them, as time was up, and the train could not be kept waiting.

"Leave me to make my own arrangements, sir!" said Neill sternly. "When my men are in the train the train will start, and not before!"

"Excuse me, Colonel Neill," said the official pertly, "you may command your regiment, but you don't command the railway!"

Neill made no reply to the fellow, but beckoned to a sergeant.

"Take that man into custody," said he.

The next moment the astonished railway official found himself roughly handled by a couple of "the Lambs," and he shrieked aloud for assistance. Guards, stokers, and porters came running up eager to help their superior; but, when they attempted to do so, in a twinkling they were stuck up against the wall, each with a man with fixed bayonet standing over him. And in this way Neill brought the station-master to reason.

The troops reached Raneegunge by the afternoon, but here their troubles began. From Raneegunge the journey would be by the Grand Trunk Road, which runs from Calcutta to Delhi, a distance of some nine hundred miles. This road was made by the East India Company, and remains one of the few memorials of their attempts to improve the communications of India.

At Raneegunge the energetic transport officer was doing his best to push on men, stores, and ammunition; but he had almost a superhuman task. Had the Company furthered the construction of railways, how easy it would have been! But the official minds of the old days cared little for India. "India for the Civil Service," was their motto. So long as they drew their salaries, India might take care of itself. Railways, irrigation works, improvements of roads, all were pooh-poohed.

The officials worked like Trojans. Every available horse and bullock along the line had been purchased by the Government; every cart and carriage secured for the conveyance of troops. The road was one incessant stream of

traffic—men in all kinds of conveyances, ammunition-wagons, rumbling artillery-trains, drawn by teams of bullocks, urged on by gesticulating and yelling drivers; camels and elephants were also pressed into the service. The river steamers were carrying men and stores; but they moved too slowly, for, apart from the windings of the Ganges, it was the dry season. The stream was perpetually varying in depth, and there was constant danger of a vessel grounding on a sand-bank.

But with all the energy and lavish expenditure of money, the transport service was miserably inadequate. The distance between Raneegunge and Benares could be traversed in five days, it is true, in a carriage drawn by horses; but how many men could be thus conveyed? Only eighteen to twenty-four every day! At this rate it would take forty-two days to transport 1,000 men to Benares only! How much longer to Cawnpore and Lucknow? What an answer to the despairing cry, "For God's sake, send us British troops!"

So, while horsed carriages were used as much as possible, the bulk of the relieving force were dispatched in bullock-wagons, which were able to take a hundred men a day; and although the time occupied was double that of the horsed carriages, yet in the long run they were quicker. But when Heron saw the long teams of bullocks, many of them weak and wretchedly underfed, painfully plodding along the dusty road, one sometimes falling, and delaying the whole train of wagons for half an hour and more, he almost

groaned aloud, for he knew how those imprisoned at Cawnpore and Lucknow must be wearily longing for the help which alone could be their salvation. He ventured to ask Colonel Hamilton what he thought were the prospects at Cawnpore.

"Sir Hugh Wheeler is alone worth a thousand men," said he. And then he added, with Scotch caution: "But I'll nae be sure Sir Hugh wad not rather ha'e the men."

Major Stirling was more communicative.

"Lord Canning thinks Cawnpore and Lucknow are safe," said he. "I saw Neill's instructions, and one passage was this, 'My object is to place at Sir Hugh Wheeler's disposal a force with which he can leave his entrenchments at Cawnpore, and show himself at Lucknow or elsewhere.'"

This dispatch, Heron subsequently learned, was withdrawn on June 10, at the very moment when Sir Hugh Wheeler was surrounded by thousands of black, howling demons, when shot and shell were crashing through the flimsy defences of his entrenchment, when death was rapidly diminishing his little force, when the women and children in his charge were suffering bodily and mental agony such as it is scarcely possible for the mind to conceive, much less to realise.

"Then," said Heron, "we shall first proceed to Cawnpore?"

"Undoubtedly, unless sufficient troops are sent up to enable us to divide our forces. There's some talk of a movable column being formed. If so, I hope the command will be given to the

man who's daily expected to arrive from Madras with the new Commander-in-Chief, Sir Patrick Grant."

"Ah! and who is he?"

"Every inch a soldier—Colonel Henry Havelock. Ask Colonel Hamilton what he thinks of Havelock. They were together at Bushire. The Persian War gave Havelock little to do. It was over too soon. The Ross-shire Buffs will be glad to see him. He led them at Mohunera, where the Persians fled at the sight of our fellows. Havelock is emphatically the man for this business. No one understands the science of war better than he does, no one knows India so well."

Major Stirling's words were prophetic. Within five days of Philip Heron's departure from Calcutta, the *Fire Queen* brought Sir Patrick Grant and Havelock into the Hooghly. They reached Calcutta on June 17, and Sir Patrick hastened to present Havelock to Lord Canning. His words of introduction were curt and to the purpose:

"Your Excellency, I have brought you the man," said he. And Lord Canning had the wisdom to think so, too.

Those few words saved India. But it was not for many months afterwards that Heron heard of them. At the moment they were being uttered he was jogging along in a villainous conveyance, the springs of which threatened to break at every jolt, vainly trying to summon a patience which he knew very well he did not possess.

CHAPTER XII

THE HAND THAT FIRED THE FUSE

FOR some days previous to the first alarm which sent the frightened residents hurrying into the entrenchment, Howard Kendrick had been going from bad to worse, and at the time of the incendiary fires, he was quite oblivious to the hubbub and confusion in the city. The plan of shutting himself in his bungalow under the plea of illness, instead of helping on his scheme of leaving Cawnpore retarded it. He had drunk so hard during his solitude that Dr. Rogers, easy-going as he was, put his foot down, and declared that the "invalid" was not in a fit state to undertake the long and arduous journey to Calcutta.

But apart from the effects of continuous "pegs" of brandy, something else happened which kept Kendrick in Cawnpore. It fell to the lot of Colonel Waring to perform a very unpleasant duty. This duty arose out of a letter he had received from Kendrick's father, the East India Company's director. Had the young man kept himself sober, he might have got away before the letter arrived; as it was, it descended upon him like a thunderbolt.

Sir Oliver Kendrick's letter reached Colonel Waring shortly after the retirement on the 21st from the barracks within the entrenchment, and when he, with many others, hoped the disturbance had blown over. In the afternoon of the 24th his buggy was at Howard Kendrick's bungalow, and the Colonel, his kindly face unwontedly stern, alighted. The real cause of Kendrick's indisposition had oozed out, and Colonel Waring was well aware what was the matter. But it was not this which made him stern. So many officers gave way to drink that an occasional excess was regarded as a venial fault.

Dr. Rogers chanced to be with the captain when Waring called, and the surgeon received the visitor in the sitting-room.

"I'm afraid, sir," said he apologetically, "that Captain Kendrick's not in a fit state to carry on a connected conversation."

"I can judge of that for myself, I presume," said the old colonel grimly; "the business which has brought me here must be cleared up at once."

Rogers raised no further opposition, but ushered Waring into the bedroom. The man on the bed turned his bloodshot eyes on the unwelcome visitor. A remnant of discipline still clung to him; the sight of the colonel had a sobering effect, and he made a strenuous effort to pull himself together.

"Au'f'ly good of you to call, sir," he mumbled.

"Glad you think so, Captain Kendrick. I won't say what's uppermost in my mind as to your folly, and the disgraceful example you're

setting to the youngsters at this time when we want men who are level-headed, and have some respect for themselves and the Service, because I've something more serious to say than to express my personal opinion of your conduct. I've had a letter from your father. I hope your mind's not too muddled to understand its purport. I'm going to read it to you."

These words fell on Howard Kendrick's brain like little hammers. He raised himself on his elbow, and glared at the old soldier, who went on remorselessly from the beginning to the end of the letter. Sir Oliver, it appeared, had received a communication from the manager of the bank at Cawnpore, stating that Captain Kendrick had considerably overdrawn his account and wishing to know what was to be done. Sir Oliver had replied that the bank must take its own course, as he had washed his hands of his son.

"I am writing to you to the same effect," the Colonel went on to read, "so that you may understand Howard's exact position. I see no reason to alter my resolve, and for the present, at all events, he must expect no assistance from me."

"On receiving this letter," continued Colonel Waring, "I called at the bank and inquired what instructions they had had from Sir Oliver, and I was told they had heard nothing from him beyond the reply to their letter, which reply confirmed what your father has written here. But—and Colonel Waring's voice took a deeper note—"they informed me that a large sum had been placed to your credit, and that

this money had come through Azimoolah Khan. Its source is evident. The Nana is supplying you with funds. For what purpose ? ”

The Colonel fixed his eyes on Kendrick, whose lips were nervously twitching in the endeavour to make some kind of answer.

“ No harm, I s’pose,” at last he jerked out, “ in . . . Nana lending . . . money. Lots of our fellows . . . done . . . same thing . . . borrowed.”

“ If there’s no harm, why did you let it be spread about that you’d made up your differences with your father ? Why did you insinuate he had supplied you with funds ? Damn it, sir, you told a confounded lie.”

Kendrick could only gaze helplessly at the irate Colonel. He was unable to say anything.

“ While you’ve been drinking your brains away, worries outside have been gathering, and by George, we’ve had a narrow escape of a repetition of Meerut, Delhi, and the latest terrible business at Futtehpore,” went on Colonel Waring.

Kendrick knew nothing of the outbreaks at these places. He was in a drunken stupor on the 20th, when the news arrived.

“ Meerut—Delhi ? What’s been going on there, sir ? ” mumbled Kendrick.

“ Murder—slaughter—massacre ! Don’t ask me. You ought to have known. Look here, Kendrick, I’ve only one thing to say to you. Unless you drop that poison ”—Colonel Waring pointed to the brandy bottle—“ you’ll be cashiered. I leave you to think over it.”

The Colonel rose, stiff and uncompromising, and stalked into the next room, where he gave Rogers something remarkably like a wiggling. Then he departed, angry, distressed, and puzzled. Waring was not like Sir Hugh Wheeler; he had no faith in Nana Sahib, and as for Azimoolah, he detested him. Ruth had told him everything, and how she suspected Azimoolah had had a hand in the attempted assassination of Dick Heron, and the Colonel agreed with her.

"I know Azimoolah's record," muttered the Colonel, as he drove back to his bungalow. "He was nothing but a charity boy. Then he was a khitmutgar, and afterwards a *munshi* to Brigadier Scott, who made him over to Brigadier Ashburnham, who kicked him out on finding he had been guilty of bribery and corruption. He's the knave, and the Nana's the fool. By Jove, a precious pair. And these are the rascals Kendrick's so thick with. What the devil does it mean?"

The Colonel might well ask the question, but not even Howard Kendrick could answer it, though his conscience might supply the key now that he knew of the tragedies at Meerut and Delhi.

Whatever effect the interview may have had on Kendrick's mind, he paid no heed to his colonel's warning, and when Rogers next entered the room he found that his patient had helped himself to the brandy and had drunk quite half a tumbler full neat. The spirit had whipped his flagging nerves for a brief space into something like action, and he was walking unsteadily about

the room muttering and gesticulating. The surgeon noticed a change had come over the man. It looked as if a crisis were approaching.

"Get back to bed," commanded Rogers.

"Mind your own business. Let me alone," retorted Kendrick. He stopped his pacing abruptly, and growled out: "What's this business at Meerut and Delhi? Why the devil didn't you tell me?"

Rogers would have avoided the subject, but Kendrick insisted upon knowing, and thinking it might bring the man to a better state of mind the surgeon related the terrible story. Kendrick listened moodily, and, to the doctor's surprise, showed no excitement or even emotion. Rogers imagined his brain was so enfeebled that he did not realise the nature of the catastrophe.

This was not the case: cause and effect were slowly evolving themselves in his mind. Howard Kendrick's thoughts were black. He saw himself as the one who had applied the torch to the materials which were only too ready for combustion. It was becoming evident to the wretched man that whatever were the doubts that had held the Nana back, they had been dispelled by the fatal talk which had enriched him, Howard Kendrick.

Then Kendrick wanted to know what had been going on in Cawnpore, and Rogers told him how fires had broken out, that the English residents had fled in panic to the entrenchment, and how they had returned when nothing more serious than the musket shot which wounded Dick Heron had happened.

Kendrick made no comment, and Rogers, thinking he might safely be left, went to call on another patient. He was absent some hours, and on his return he found a crowd of excited sepoys and natives outside Kendrick's bungalow, and Kendrick himself behaving like a madman. What had occurred was this: Kendrick, armed with a musket, had wandered out into the darkness, had been challenged by a cavalry patrol, and had fired at the man, fortunately missing him. This untoward circumstance hastened events. The sowar made his complaint; a court-martial was held on Kendrick, who was acquitted, on the ground of his condition at the time, and it was held that his musket must have gone off by accident.

The decision gave mortal offence to the troopers of the Second Cavalry, who had long been looked upon as active in the work of discontent, and angry mutters were heard that maybe it wouldn't be very long before *their* weapons went off by mistake too.

Two days after this Kendrick's body was found floating in the Ganges Canal.

The consternation the discovery caused was terrible. Some tried to find comfort in the supposition that the wretched man had, in a fit of mania, committed suicide, but the general feeling was that the curtain was about to rise upon revolt and bloodshed. Yet up to May 30 all was calm, and Sir Hugh Wheeler was so sure he could command the situation, that he actually passed on to Lucknow a part of the detachment of the 84th, which had been

sent from Benares. As rank and file crossed the bridge and marched towards the capital of Oudh, there was many a malicious smile on the faces of the dusky crowd, watching the redcoats depart.

Early in the evening of June 4 Ruth was sitting in a corner of the verandah of Colonel Waring's bungalow, her heart full of dire misgiving, when a native stealthily approached, and slipped a note into her hand. He immediately glided away.

The note ran thus :—

“ This is the last chance, Miss Armitage. The lives of the English—men, women, and children—are numbered, but I can yet save *you*. If you accept my offer, be at the wall of the entrenchment near the road leading to the canal at nightfall.”

The note could be from no other than Azimoolah ; the angry blood rushed to her pale cheeks, and she crushed the note in her nervous fingers. She was about to tear the paper into fragments, when it occurred to her the General ought to see it. It might convey to him a warning.

She instantly went to head-quarters. The General was not there. He had gone to pass the night, as usual, near his men of the 53rd. There was no one high in command. Apparently, some event was near at hand, or why should all the principal officers be absent ? Even Colonel Waring, though his hurt was not well, was away.

"I dare not take it to the General," said the old sergeant-major to whom she had spoken. "But I'll get a messenger. Ha! What's this? Something amiss?"

A dozen—fifty—a hundred pistol shots were heard. The reports were not simultaneous, but came in clusters so to speak. The firing was in the direction of the quarters of the 2nd Cavalry, and the next moment was heard the thud, thud of horses' hoofs, and the shouting of men. Then a column of fire shot in the air. One loud report awoke the echoes, and reverberated with sullen thunder.

"Great Heavens, what is that?" cried Ruth, tremblingly.

"The garrison alarm gun, miss. We're in for it now. The devils have broken loose!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE FLIGHT TO THE ENTRENCHMENTS

THE much-dreaded explosion had come. In a flash the news had spread that the 2nd Cavalry had mutinied, and having set fire to the riding-master's bungalow, had fled, carrying off with them horses, arms, colours, and the regimental treasure chest.

Alarmed by the sound of the signal gun crowds of civilians—men, women and children, in a pitiable state of fright—came pouring into the entrenchments for shelter. Up to this time they had been lodged in tents, in the soldiers' church of St. John, and in other buildings. Made uneasy by the threatening state of affairs, they had left their houses and bungalows, quite a week previous, and had taken up their quarters as best they could.

Four guns were placed in position inside the entrenchment, manned by European artillerymen, who in strange headgear, nightcaps and wideawakes, and side-arms looked like melodramatic buccancers. A seething crowd of every colour, sect, and profession filled up the barracks, and every five minutes buggies, palki-gharries, vehicles of all sorts, drove up and discharged

cargoes of writers, tradesmen, and a miscellaneous mob of every complexion—white and tawny—all in a state of terror.

Ladies were sitting down at the rough mess tables in the barracks with their ayahs and swarms of frightened children; and upon this scene of scare and crowding the Indian sun poured down its scorching rays, and the air, undisturbed by punkah or cooled by wet mats, was stifling, foetid, intolerable.

Through all the scene of confusion, and despite the gathering fears of the women, the brave old General was cheery and calm. Yet even he had come to the conclusion that the danger could not be averted. The crowding of the Europeans into the entrenchment had increased the distrust of the sepoys. Confidence was at an end.

The barracks, simply a long building with a thatched roof and a verandah, situated at the south-west corner of the entrenchment, became terribly crowded, and the scene was very painful. Every one was full of dire apprehensions as to what was about to happen, and it was this ignorance of the future and the vague presentiment of coming evil which made the suspense so agonising.

Men held their wives' hands, and tried to whisper words of comfort and hope; women clasped their weeping children to their bosoms, and soothed their fears. The only portion of happy humanity in that seething multitude were the babies, who smiled in their mothers' frightened eyes in all the happiness of ignorance

and innocence. In the midst of this distress came the sound of distant musketry and artillery, while the pale dawn was heralded by a crimson light in the direction of the 2nd Cavalry lines in the south, where barracks and bungalows were blazing.

When Ruth returned to the thatched barrack from the General's quarters, she found the little space near the verandah which had been assigned to her, invaded by two ladies and their children.

"We are so sorry to inconvenience you," said one of the ladies apologetically, "but we don't know where to go, and——" a sob stopped her utterance.

"You need not be sorry," said Ruth gently, "we must do our best to share each other's burdens. Have you just come?"

"About an hour ago. We had arranged for carriages, but hearing of the outbreak of the cavalry, we thought they might stop us, and so we walked. This is my sister"—pointing to the other lady—"and my husband is somewhere about. These are my children. We were very frightened when we got to the canal bridge, for we saw a number of sepoy's armed with muskets, apparently lying in wait for somebody. On seeing us, some pretended to be washing their hands, and others drinking water, but all looked quite confused. It was terribly alarming, for the place was very solitary, and it was almost dark. We turned and ran, and got to the entrenchment by a roundabout road, and we are very thankful indeed we reached here safely."

"And you know nothing of what has happened?"

"No; we only heard the guns firing."

Ruth did her best to comfort the agitated women, but it was not much that she could do. She was oppressed by a terrible feeling of helplessness, and how that terrible night of suspense passed, she scarcely knew. However, in spite of the suffocating heat, her anxiety, and the distress around her, fatigue at last overcame her, and she fell into an uneasy slumber.

The sun was already hot when she was awakened by the tramp of footsteps on the verandah. Half a dozen soldiers were bringing in an improvised ambulance of bamboo, on which was lying a grey-bearded native soldier, his head enveloped in bandages. The wounded man, Ruth was afterwards told, was the gallant old soubadah-major of the mutinous 2nd Cavalry—the solitary instance of any native belonging to that regiment who retained his fidelity. When the men broke out, they ordered him to accompany them on pain of immediate death. The faithful old fellow steadily refused, and said he would neither go with them himself, nor sanction their doing so. The ringleaders then fell upon him, and he defended the colours of the treasure which were in the quarter-guard as long as he could, and at last fell covered with wounds. The fellows left him for dead, but when found by our men, he was still alive, and brought into the entrenchment, where he died after a few days.

All that morning the women and children were

huddled together, not one daring to go out. The heat was intense, and the punkah which was rigged up did not seem to make much difference. The musketry firing continued for some hours, and then was suddenly succeeded by the sullen boom of artillery. What did this portend—victory or further disaster? Who could tell?

At ten o'clock there was a terrible scare inside the barrack. It was the first shot fired by the mutineers at the entrenchment. It came from a nine-pounder on the north-west, struck the mud wall, and glided out into the barrack. A large party of ladies and children were at the time outside, and the consternation was indescribable. The bugle call sent every man instantly to his post, many of them carrying in their ears for the first time the peculiar whizzing of round shot, with which they were soon to become familiar.

The intention of the mutineers was probably to unsteady the nerves of those within the entrenchment—a favourite method in the East of preparing for an attack—for in a short time the artillery fire ceased, and a group of officers were seen approaching the barrack. Among them, Ruth recognised Colonel Waring. She could not restrain her impatience. She knew he would be longing to be assured of her safety, and heedless of the blazing sun, she ran across the compound to meet him. He took both her hands and kissed her.

"Cheer up, my dear girl," whispered the old colonel. "At least we have not been taken by surprise. We know now our friends from

foes. We shall hold our own, never fear. Come into the shade. I don't want my Ruth to have sun-stroke."

They entered the verandah, and were immediately surrounded by an anxious crowd, eager to hear the tidings.

It seemed that an hour or two after the flight of the cavalry the 1st Native Infantry also bolted, leaving their officers untouched upon the parade ground. Indeed, before going away they begged of their officers (who, like those of the other regiments, had for some time been in the habit of sleeping in the quarter-guard) to leave them. As to the two other regiments—the 53rd and the 56th—what had precisely happened was not very clear. The accounts differed.

"It was like this," said a young officer. "At seven o'clock this morning Major Lampson, Captain Attnell, and Captain Lawford rode out after the beggars, who had gone off to reconnoitre, and Ashe's battery was ordered to pursue. They got as far as the canal, when suddenly came an order for the guns to be brought back, as it looked as if the 53rd and 56th were about to break out. Whether that was so or not, I cannot tell. Anyhow, I know that the 56th went off, and that about half-past nine nearly the whole of the native commissioned officers of the 53rd reported to Sir Hugh that their remonstrances were no good. The men were determined to go. Then the General ordered Ashe's battery to open fire on them. I don't see what else he could have done," added the speaker, in an apologetic tone.

"It was a mistake—a horrible mistake!" exclaimed Colonel Waring, with emphasis, "and a mistake for which we may suffer severely. The General was misinformed. The men were peacefully occupied in their lines cooking; no signs of mutiny had appeared in their ranks; they had refused all the solicitations of the deserters to accompany them, and seemed quite steadfast, when Ashe's battery opened fire upon them by Sir Hugh Wheeler's command, and they were literally driven from us by nine-pounders. It was inexcusable."

"Well, sir, I can't say anything about that. The officers of the 53rd are certainly all right, and they've been ordered to occupy the Artillery Hospital for the present," said the young fellow.

All that day carts were going and coming, laden with the baggage of those who had taken refuge in the entrenchment. Every now and then a fresh blaze showed where the mutineers had set fire to a bungalow; but up to this time, with the exception of the murderous outrage on the soubadah-major, they had not taken the life of any one—certainly of no English person. At least those in the entrenchment were congratulating themselves that this was the case. That very afternoon they were undeceived.

About two o'clock the corpse of a European was brought into the entrenchment in a cart by some natives, and it was at once recognised as that of Mr. Murphy, of the East Indian Railway. The poor fellow had started to go to his bungalow on the railway line, and seeing some mutineers in the distance, shouted for his horse to be

brought. He mounted, and galloped towards the entrenchment ; but a volley was fired, and he was shot in the back and head.

After this there could be no mistaking the intentions of the mutineers, and within a few minutes the bugle was heard sounding the assembly for a general muster in the open space in front of the thatched barrack. Hither hurried all the men, civil as well as military, every one indeed, within the entrenchment capable of bearing arms. They were divided into sections, and officers appointed, and then arms and ammunition were served out from a pile of weapons brought away from the sepoy lines.

Danger was rapidly approaching, and it was clear that the handful of Englishmen would soon be fighting for their lives, and for the lives of those most dear to them, the news coming that evening that the native artillery attached to Ashe's Oudh Horse Battery had become mutinous. The men who belonged to this battery, after being disarmed, were turned out of the entrenchment.

Just before night came on sentries were appointed, and the new military part of the garrison who had just been enrolled took their turn in the trenches. Hours of intense anxiety were passed, but nothing happened to cause alarm. All that the sentries had to report was the continual burning of bungalows in every direction.

The next morning was June 7, and great excitement was caused by the arrival of a messenger from the Nana. He was at once taken to General Wheeler. The old General, who spoke Hindustani as fluently as he spoke Eng-

lish, received the man coldly, hardly acknowledging his low salaam. The two presented a remarkable contrast—the white-headed, somewhat diminutive (Sir Hugh Wheeler was a little man) English soldier, upright as a dart, and the cringing, dusky Oriental, who happened to be above the average stature of the Hindoo.

"Well?" said the General stiffly, "and what says Seereek Dhoondoo Punth?"

It was significant of the General's feelings that he no longer used the Nana's courtesy title but called him by his real name.

"I have a letter from the Maharajah," said the man, bending low.

General Wheeler broke the seal, and as he read his brows contracted till the white eyebrows stood out stiff and bushy. The man slyly watched the General's face, and after a long pause, said obsequiously:

"What answer am I to convey to his Highness?"

"There is no answer! Go!" was the stern reply. "Burdon," he added rapidly, in English, to a young lieutenant who was acting as his secretary, "hurry this fellow away. He may want to delay and spy out our defences. When he is gone, summon all the officers here."

Within five minutes the General was surrounded by a group of resolute men, every one of whom he could trust to the last drop of their blood.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Hugh curtly. "I have just received this letter from the Nana, in which he is good enough to express his intention

of attacking us at once. You are Englishmen and know what to do. I need say no more."

"The infamous traitor," shouted Colonel Waring.

The old General shrugged his shoulders and made no reply. No one had believed more in the honesty of the Nana than General Wheeler. Doubts had been thrown on the fidelity of the Mahratta, and Sir Hugh had even been warned against him; but alas! with no effect.

It was no use wasting time over vain regrets, and the General at once proceeded to discuss the best way of utilising the little force at his disposal. Meanwhile native messengers who could be relied upon were dispatched in hot haste to the cantonments to bring in those officers who had not yet vacated their houses. Not a minute was lost in obeying the order. Goods and chattels of every kind were left to fall a prey to the rebel sepoys and goojurs, who, after appropriating everything they fancied, set fire to the bungalows.

The day was Sunday, and the thoughts of all went to peaceful England. The poor women could in imagination hear the church bells ringing, and tears filled their eyes.

What kind of place was it that these doomed men, women, and children—numbering in all about a thousand souls, of whom 225 were women, and 320 children—had gathered in for protection? It consisted of two long hospital barracks, one (already mentioned) with a thatched roof, and the other wholly of masonry. They were single-storied buildings, with ver-

andahs running round them, and with the usual outhouses attached. These two buildings were some 120 ft. apart, and between them was a well, the only source of water-supply, wholly unprotected from the fire of the enemy.

The shape of the entrenchment was, roughly speaking, an oblong of about 800 ft. by 500 ft. enclosing the two barracks, and consisted simply of a mud wall, at no place higher than 4 ft., and not even bullet proof at the crest, for the scorching sun had crumbled the surface to powder. The apertures for the artillery exposed both the guns and the gunners, whilst an enemy in the buildings adjacent to the earth-works outside could find ample cover.

Around the entrenchment the guns were placed, three on the north-east and three on the south, to range the plain which separated the officers' cantonments from the city. A small three-pounder which had been rifled some time before, was also placed in position; but it could only be used for grape, as there was no conical shot in store. In addition, there was Lieutenant Ashe's half-battery of horse artillery, consisting of two nine-pounders and a twenty-four pounder howitzer. These ten guns were all the artillery which could be brought to the position, and they constituted the garrison's sole means of defence by artillery, the poor little mud wall being the only bulwark. Ammunition was plentiful, there being in the field magazines two thousand pounds of powder, with ball cartridges and round shot in abundance.

At half-past ten on this day, June 8, the

enemy opened fire, and the bugle inside the entrenchment sounded "All hands to arms!" Immediately every man proceeded to the earthworks, and nearly all day, exposed to the hot winds and scorching rays of the fierce Indian sun, awaited the attack of the foe. There was a difference of opinion as to when this attack would come. No one knew if the rebels had any recognised leaders, and without leaders the native troops would not be very eager to try conclusions with their late masters.

"They haven't got the pluck to come on by themselves," cried Dick, who with an Enfield was making good practice at the dusky figures moving about, as they imagined, out of range of the rifles.

"That was a good shot of yours, Heron. It's sent the cowards to the shelter of that building. Look how they're running! Mind that round shot, it's coming our way. Move, McQuin," shouted Colonel Waring to a gunner who was standing close by.

The man evidently saw the shot, but he stood rooted to the spot in a kind of fatal fascination. He could have got away, but he did not attempt to do so, and he was killed instantly. This was the first death within the entrenchment.

As the day advanced, the fire of the enemy grew hotter, and the range better, but only a few balls struck the barracks. But few as they were, they caused the utmost terror. All through that terrifying day the shrieks of the women and children were heard, and their wailings were at times heartrending; but after the initiation

of the first day, they learned silence, and never uttered a sound, except when groaning from the horrible pain and suffering they had to endure.

No musketry was fired by the sepoys for some hours. The idea evidently was to batter down the earthworks first, and this they thought would not take long. Here they were totally mistaken. They did not know the bulldog tenacity of the British. When night fell, however, incessant volleys of musketry began. Rest was utterly impossible. Waiting the assault supposed to be impending, not a man closed his eyes in sleep, and throughout the whole siege snatches of troubled slumber under the cover of the wall constituted the sole relief the poor weary men could obtain. It was still worse for the women, who, shut up in the stifling barracks, could only endure; and endure they did, with a patience and courage that have rarely been equalled and never surpassed.

When morning broke on the second day, it revealed a terribly painful sight in the groups of jaded women and children, many of them so wan and helpless in appearance as almost to suggest death itself. A few were lying on mattresses, others were on rugs and mats, but many had nothing but the bare boards to rest upon.

Ruth shared her corner with the two ladies and the children already mentioned and, like the others, scarcely slept for five consecutive minutes. Apart from the rattle of muskets, the moaning of the children, who suffered intensely with thirst, was enough to keep her

awake. When she saw the little ones, with large, staring, tearful eyes and flushed cheeks, crying vainly for water to cool their parched throats, her heart went out to them in pity.

"I will see what can be done," said she. "Where is Dhoolah Singh?"

She went in search of this man, who was one of Mrs. Waring's servants. He was not to be found—nor were any of the others. All the servants had slipped away during the night. The commencement of hostilities was sufficient for them.

Thrown on her own resources, Ruth tried to find a water vessel not exhausted, but she failed. All the skins for containing water were empty, and so were the buckets.

"This is terrible!" she said to a tall, stout, good-natured woman named Widdowson, the wife of a private in the 32nd Regiment, who afterwards distinguished herself in a remarkable way. "The poor little dears are parched, and they won't believe me when I tell them there's no water."

"My God!" cried the woman. "They'd be a good deal happier if they were dead. It's hard to see 'em suffer so."

"Where's the well?" asked Ruth suddenly.

"Over yonder, just in front of the barracks—worse luck."

It was about a hundred feet away, and exposed to the fire of the enemy.

"Give me a bucket. I'll go and get some water."

"You!" exclaimed the horrified woman.

"Why, my dear, good young lady, it's as much as your life is worth."

"Some one must do it," said Ruth desperately.

The woman would have detained her, but Ruth was too quick. Seizing a bucket, she threaded her way amidst the groups of recumbent figures, and reached the verandah. For one instant she paused. With the dawn, the sepoy artillery had reopened fire. The aim was very bad, but this in no way lessened her risk. As Ruth stood hesitating, a round shot passed close to the well. Had she been drawing water at the time, it must have killed her.

Then it occurred to her that the chances were against a shot going over that precise spot a second time, within a few minutes, and without waiting another instant, she dashed forward, and reached the well in safety, returning with a bucket full of water. It was a daring deed, and one she was never permitted to repeat.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE MIDST OF DEATH THERE IS LOVE

FOR two days General Wheeler's stronghold had been besieged. The Nana imagined that a couple of hours' sharp firing, with heavy guns, would destroy the British garrison, and entire possession of the entrenchment would follow. So impressed was he with the idea of his invincibility, that he made a vow not to alight from his horse until the English had surrendered !

He was convinced of his mistake on the very first day ; and when evening arrived, and no sign appeared of defeat or surrender, he was obliged to descend from the saddle ; and ordering a carpet to be spread in a deep ditch near one of his batteries, there he passed the night. On the following morning, finding little or no hope of success, he removed into Duncan's Hotel, about three quarters of a mile from the entrenchment, and on the outskirts of the native city.

To the besieged it was soon evident the question of the commissariat would speedily become one of vital importance. Either in consequence of the deception of the native agents who had been engaged to send in supplies, or because

Sir Hugh Wheeler had only arranged for the support of the military, the stock of provisions was ridiculously insufficient.

Nor was this the worst oversight. The place of storage for the casks of beer which had been brought in was so unfortunately selected that within twenty-four hours the greater part of these casks were tapped by the enemy's shot, and deep were the lamentations of the men at the loss of so much valuable liquor. While the dainties, tinned and otherwise, lasted they were equally divided without regard to rank; and odd indeed was the assortment which went to make up each one's allowance.

"What's the bill o' fare to-day?" asked a private meeting a comrade coming from the stores, where Captain Williamson had been serving out the rations.

"I'm in luck, laddie—a mug o' champagne, a tin o' preserved 'errings, an' half a pot o' jam," said Tommy.

"My! I hope as how that'll be my luck too."

But this was not possible. However, Tommy's comrade did very well with tinned salmon, rum, and a box of sweetmeats. The first two he kept for himself, and the third he gave to the children, and piteous it was to see the poor little things trying to make themselves happy, while shots every now and then crashed through the frail walls of the barracks, and the hideous sounds of bursting shells and volleys of musketry drowned their feeble voices.

The mixed and luxurious fare soon came to an end. After the dainties were exhausted,

the rice and flour were reserved for the women and children, and soon even these were reduced to the monotonous and scanty allowance of one meal a day, consisting of a handful of split peas and a handful of flour—scarcely more than half a pint together for a daily ration.

On this scanty fare the devoted little band of defenders had to perform incessant labour under a tropical sun, in the hottest part of the day. Many of the civilians had never been accustomed to go out in the hot winds, except in a covered conveyance, and they suffered severely when on sentry duty, some covering up their heads with cloths dipped in water, others putting up a temporary shelter of empty boxes, sheets, baskets, or anything their ingenuity could suggest.

The first three days were terrible. Fatalities were numerous, and a portion of the thatched barrack was transformed into a hospital, and thither the dead and dying were carried. The women were never tiring in their attentions to those who were struck down, and the surgeons worked incessantly, but their means and appliances were very limited, and the small stock of linen clothing was speedily reduced in supplying bandages.

It is impossible to imagine the terrible effect the sudden bursting of large shells in the verandah, and elsewhere in close proximity to the barracks, had upon the tenderly reared ladies and children. In one or two cases the shock was so great as actually to cause death. The casualties were as appalling as they were unexpected. On the third day of the firing, seven



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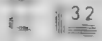
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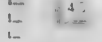
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servants took shelter under the verandah. They were leaning against the wall, when a shell falling outside bounded in their midst, and burst with tremendous effect, causing instant death to five, and wounding the sixth. The seventh escaped unhurt.

What added to the horror was that the dead had to remain unburied until the night. No one dared to perform the last offices to loved ones and friends in the daytime, when a continual shower of shot and shell and a hailstorm of bullets were pouring over the devoted place.

Sadly and silently were these funerals performed. At first the mourners attempted to dig graves, but they soon abandoned the task; there had been no rain for months, the ground was too hard, and there was great danger of being shot, for at intervals all through the night came harassing volleys of musketry, fired as much with the idea of destroying rest as with the intention of killing.

So, after a time, outside the mud wall of the entrenchment, and near a block of unfinished barracks, an enclosure was parted off and converted into a cemetery, and there within three weeks were laid two hundred and fifty men, women, and children. Sad was their fate, but at least it was a happier one than that of those they left behind.

On the fourth day of the siege Ruth was coming from the hospital, where she had been doing her best to tend the wounded. She was weary and worn, and the effect of semi-starvation was asserting itself in her face, which had already

lost its roundness. Two little children—orphans of but twelve hours' date, the father a private, having been killed by a musket ball, and the mother having died of sunstroke—came running towards her. They were crying bitterly. She took the youngest, a curly-headed boy of four, in her arms and kissed and soothed him.

The heat and the foul atmosphere of the interior of the barracks were unbearable, and she stepped into the verandah with the child in her arms. The enemy's fire was at that moment directed towards the other side of the entrenchment. She could just see over the low wall, and while looking she was startled by an unexpected sight—an English officer galloping over the plain near the sepoy lines!

Hope sprang within her heart. Surely this solitary horseman must be the pioneer of a relieving force. She darted into the barrack wild with excitement.

"They're coming! They're coming!" she cried.

At first the poor women thought she was alluding to the sepoys, and they shrank back in terror; but a second look at her radiant face reassured them.

"Our soldiers are coming!" she gasped.
 "We're saved! saved!"

She returned to the verandah followed by a group of excited women, and they too, saw the single horseman, and, breathless with excitement, watched him run the gauntlet of a deadly fire. He bore a charmed life, for not a bullet touched him. But where was the advancing force whose

approach he was supposed to be heralding? Not a man was to be seen.

The sepoy's at a distance yelled and screamed and fired at random, but they dared not pursue the daring rider. They had a wholesome fear of the accuracy of the fire from behind the entrenchment's rampart.

Urging on his exhausted horse, the gallant soldier rode straight as an arrow towards the entrenchment, and a loud hurrah burst from a hundred English throats as the animal made its final effort, and, clearing the wall, fell a struggling heap of man and horse the other side. A dozen volunteers, Dick Heron among the number, heedless of sepoy bullets, rushed to the assistance of the fugitive.

"My God, Bolton, is it you?" cried Dick, grasping both hands.

The two were old comrades. Bolton was a lieutenant in the 7th Cavalry, which had been encamped at Choubeyapore, a few miles to the north-west of Cawnpore.

Bolton shook himself free from his stirrups and struggled to his feet, but he was too exhausted either to speak or walk. He looked like a man who had seen unspeakable things. He was assisted into the barracks, and taken to General Wheeler's quarters. A little brandy—there was not much left in the medical stores—revived him. The old white-headed General looked sadly enough at the young officer.

"You bring bad news, Bolton. I can read disaster in your face," said General Wheeler.

"Disaster indeed, sir. The 7th have mutinied

and murdered all their officers. I alone have escaped."

Bolton's voice was low and stern. He seemed to speak with difficulty. The tones were hollow and broken. The memory of the scenes he had witnessed was at that moment too vivid for description. Nor did General Wheeler ask for details. When death was all around what did it matter how others died? The old man's hands were clenched tightly. It was the only sign of emotion he showed. Presently he said, in an ordinary voice and manner, as though he were asking the time of day:

"When did this happen?"

"Yesterday evening. I've been riding all night. I found all the main roads blocked by rebels, but I reached the city somehow, and there heard a worse story than that of the deaths of my poor comrades. Three boats with some thirty men, the same number of ladies, and about sixty children, arrived the day before yesterday from Futteghur. They had not heard what had happened at Cawnpore, and they hoped to find shelter here."

"Shelter in Cawnpore!" muttered the general with a groan, "Poor creatures! poor creatures!"

"It's too awful for words," returned Bolton, his voice quivering. "They got to within a mile of the magazine, when the boats grounded. The cowardly fiends opened fire upon them, and the fugitives rushed for protection into the long grass on the banks of the river. The wretches then set fire to the grass, and two of the ladies

and some of the children were burnt to death. What could the rest do but surrender ? ”

“ And then ? ”

The old General spoke almost mechanically ; his lips twitched for an instant, then were firm once more.

“ And then—my God, it’s too horrible to think ! The men were bound together and driven like a flock of sheep to the slaughter. The women and children, many of them without shoes, dragged themselves along with cut and bleeding feet. No food was given them, and very little water. Yesterday they were taken before the Nana, and some say that the villain was inclined to show mercy, but that his brother Bala and the troopers of the 2nd Cavalry were thirsting for blood. However this may be, at three o’clock yesterday afternoon the captive men, women, and children were driven into a heap, and this devil Bala sat upon a big stone in the plain, and gave the word to fire. After discharging two rounds of shot the wretches fell upon the poor victims with swords and bayonets, and completed the slaughter.”

The two men, one full of years, the other just past the threshold of manhood, looked at each other. The fire of righteous vengeance flashed in the eyes of both. The General brought down his hand heavily upon the little table in front of him.

“ If I am spared,” he cried, “ if—but it is a waste of words to say what one would do with these human tigers. What happened to the poor souls from Futteghur yesterday may happen to us to-morrow. Bolton,” said he, suddenly

breaking off, "not a word of this massacre to any one. It mustn't get to the ears of the women. They've behaved nobly. One would expect nothing else from English women. Heaven alone knows their terrible trials, their anguish of mind, their agony of body. Don't let us add a single pang to their misery."

"You may depend upon me, sir," cried the young lieutenant with emphasis.

At that moment a step was heard outside the door of the little room set apart for the use of General Wheeler; and Captain Moore, one of the many heroic men who fought like lions throughout that terrible time till death overtook them, entered. His face and hands were dirt-begrimed, his beard was of a week's growth, his clothes were soiled and tattered, one of his arms was in a sling.

"What is it, Moore?" asked Sir Hugh.

"It's getting too hot in barrack No. 4, sir. Heberden, Latouche, and Miller are doing splendid work, but it is wearing them out. The black devils dare not show themselves, but they're only waiting their time. We ought to spare a dozen men for barrack No. 4."

"Can we do it?"

"Yes, sir. Captain Jenkins is ready with a detachment. You've only to say the word. The barrack ought to be held at all costs."

"Very well, Moore. Let the men go."

These barracks, of which No. 4—referred to by Captain Moore—was one, played a very important part in the defence of the entrenchment. They consisted of a series of nine un-

finished detached buildings intended for the accommodation of the native infantry. They were in course of erection when the siege began, and were of red brick, each being about 200 ft. in length. They were situated outside the entrenchment, and ran in a line nearly north and south.

Of these buildings only one—No. 4—had a roof, and that was only of a temporary character. None of them had any floor, and heaps of bricks and building materials were strewn about. Captain Moore saw the importance of these barracks when the construction of the entrenchment was commenced, and before a shot was fired took possession of them. Commanding the entrenchment as they did, they afforded admirable cover for an enemy, who from a shelter could harass the besieged from innumerable loopholes, and be themselves in perfect safety.

Unfortunately, the force at General Wheeler's disposal was not large enough to allow the whole of these barracks to be occupied. Only two could be held, and the rest fell into the hands of the rebels. The two exceptions were Nos. 2 and 4. No. 4 was defended by the three gallant men just mentioned, Heberden, Latouche, and Miller, railway engineers and surveyors; and valiantly these brave fellows fought, though their first (and last) military experience was here. Their profession had sharpened their sight; they were admirable judges of distance, and they never raised their rifles but a sepoy bit the dust.

No. 2 was under the charge of Captain Mow-

bray Thomson, destined to be one of the survivors of the heroic garrison. He had erected a sort of crow's nest inside the barrack with the building materials he found, and here a man was stationed, who, as soon as he saw any sign of movement among the sepoy's in No. 1 barrack, gave the signal to his comrades below, and any sepoy who ventured out never went back. Captain Stirling, a splendid shot, never missed his man, and from first to last must have killed many scores of the enemy.

The task of relieving barrack No. 4 was one of great difficulty, and attended with considerable danger, quite two hundred yards separating the barrack from the rampart of the entrenchment. Captain Jenkins got his men together, and they were about to dash across the intervening space, when a shell burst near them, and so terribly wounded one poor fellow that he died the same evening. Dick Heron volunteered to fill the man's place.

Captain Jenkins looked at Dick's thin, eager face, pale, delicate, more boyish than ever, and hesitated.

"Do you realise what this means, Heron?" said he. "You may never come back."

"I can take my chance with the rest, I suppose," returned Dick. "It's not much more dangerous than staying here."

"That's true. Very well, I'll take you."

In one sense the delay caused by the bursting shell, apart from the loss of a valuable man, was fortunate. It was discovered that by an oversight sufficient ammunition had not been served

out. It was intended that each man should have as much as he could carry. This was very important, for there was no store in the barrack, and when the defenders were short of cartridges, a man had to run across to the entrenchment and take the chance of being shot on the way.

The serving out of the ammunition was likely to take some little time, and while it was being done Dick glanced at the thatched barrack where the women were lodged. He had an intense longing to see Ruth Armitage before he set out. If he were never to see her again! He could not resist the impulse, and dashed across to the verandah. He had caught sight of her as she was about to enter the barrack. When he reached her, he saw she had been crying.

"Good-bye, Miss—no, I can't call you Miss Armitage. It's Ruth now, isn't it?"

He held out his hand and she took it a little shyly.

"Good-bye?" said she, ignoring his words about calling her by her Christian name. "Where are you going?"

"Across to No. 4 barrack. I thought that you—that I might—dash it all, I can't say what I want to say! Ah, how cruel it all is!"

A look of pain and despair crept into the eyes of the poor young fellow. When death came, it would be sweeter if he were to die with the girl he loved; and this was what he wanted to tell her. Ruth could say nothing. She knew that he loved her, and she was very sorry for him.

Dick held Ruth's hand tightly. He wanted

to remember that clasp. At that moment life was divided from death by a thread, which might snap without warning: there was no time for emotion, and his voice was quite steady when he next spoke.

"I may never see you again, Ruth. That's why I said good-bye."

Ruth was not so calm as he. Dick felt her hand go cold as ice.

"You are better off than we are," she stammered. "At least you will die fighting, but we poor women——"

Something seemed to rise in her throat and choke her utterance. It was much the same with Dick. The two were silent for a few seconds, and during those few seconds the horrors around them were unseen, the boom of shot and shell, the crack of bullets were unheard. The moments were flying; soon he must tear himself away. Dick forced himself to speak.

"I want to ask a favour of you," he went on huskily. "May I have something of yours—I don't care how trifling—to cheer me? I'm a stupid fool, I know, and I suppose if things were different from what they are, it would be no good telling you that—that—Heaven help me, I can't keep it to myself any longer—I love you. There, it's out! Don't be angry with me."

"Angry?" faltered Ruth. "Why should I be angry? What does it matter—now?"

"True, what does it matter?" he replied, drawing a deep breath. "Still, if I thought that you had a little love for me—if you only liked me very much——"

"Don't say any more," interrupted Ruth agitatedly. "How can women help loving men who are sacrificing their lives as you are all doing? I know, every woman knows, that but for us you would march out and cut your way through the ring of fire. Many would fall, but some would escape, while if you stay there is but one doom for every one. Yes, I love you for your bravery."

She put out her hands and clasped his frankly.

"Ah, I don't mean that," he cried. "Who wouldn't be brave with such as you to guard?"

"Heron, we're ready. Hurry!" was heard the voice of Captain Jenkins through the din.

"Dear Ruth—if—I'm spared, I——"

He could say no more. At that supreme moment words, no matter how eloquent, were meaningless. He raised her hand and pressed it to his lips, and then something in her eyes told him that such a cold, formal leave-taking was childish. He threw formality to the winds, took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. He felt the warm pressure of her lips in return. He released her, pale and weeping. She had intense pity for the poor young fellow, and would have uttered words of comfort if she could.

"Take this," she whispered hurriedly, dragging a silk handkerchief from round her neck. He seized it eagerly, his face mantling with pleasure.

"God bless and save you, darling," he cried. "Your gift is my mascotte!"

His eyes bright and jubilant he thrust the handkerchief in his vest, and waving his cap rushed away. Ruth, her heart panting the

while, watched him join the party, who by this time were scaling the low rampart, and running one by one to No. 4 barrack.

Throughout the mutiny, not only at Cawnpore, but elsewhere, nothing succeeded so well as audacity. The very daring of our men had the effect of paralysing the sepoys, and though hardly one of that little party of forlorn hope ought to have reached the barrack alive or unwounded, there was not a casualty. The gallant band of engineers, exhausted as they were, summoned strength to give their relievers a hearty English cheer.

That day the fire of the enemy was unusually fierce, and it was rumoured that on the morrow, June 11, a grand attempt to storm the entrenchment would be made, and that the attack would be led by Nana Sahib in person. The defenders of No. 2 barrack were on the alert, but nothing unusual happened. Just before nightfall they saw a man cautiously lower himself over the rampart, and dart across the intervening space. This man was brave Captain Moore.

"Boys," cried Moore breathlessly, as soon as he entered the barrack, "now's the time to give the rascals a lesson. Who's game for a dash to spike their guns? We ought to know how to do it," he added grimly, "for they're our own."

The group around Moore volunteered to a man.

"Sorry," said he, "I can't have you all. Six must remain behind to throw the scoundrels off the scent with a hot fire."

The three engineers, greatly to their disappoint-

ment, and three of the relief party were selected to stay in the little fort. Moore pointed out that the utmost activity was needed, and the engineers were too worn out for the demand likely to be made on their strength.

When it was fully dark, Moore and his party set out, creeping along the sandy bed of what, in the wet season, was a water course. A couple of big guns had that day been dragged by the rebels from the magazine, and Moore had spotted the place where they had been planted.

Like snakes the men wound their way along, not one breathing a word though they might have talked with perfect safety, for the incessant firing would have drowned their voices. Anxiety and strained nerves kept them silent.

"Heron," whispered Moore, "I've seen you sprint on the running-ground. Now's your chance to show what your best is like. We two will do the spiking, and the others will keep off any of the devils who may spot us."

Dick felt a sudden glow pass over him. He could have rushed on to the work at that moment, but Moore restrained him.

"Wait till I give the word," the Captain whispered.

Moore issued his orders to the men who were following, and crept on, Dick keeping close by his side.

"Halt! We're near the spot now," said Moore, under his breath.

The bank of the nullah was very low at this point, and Moore paused for a moment to reconnoitre.

"There are the guns," he breathed; "about a hundred yards ahead, a little to the right. Now for it."

They climbed the bank. On reaching the top, a couple of sepoy caught sight of them, crouching though they were, and with a yell of terror took to their heels. They had seen Moore's face, and maybe recognised him. Probably they imagined he was at the head of an attacking force, and they rushed away to give the alarm.

"Quick, Heron, they mustn't reach the tents!" muttered Moore from between his set teeth.

His revolver was in readiness, and he shot one dead. The other, who was some distance in advance, ran his hardest, but the champion sprinter of Cawnpore was pursuing him. He had scarcely covered twenty yards when Dick cut him down. His death must have been almost instantaneous. The next moment Dick found Captain Moore by his side.

"That was well done," Dick heard Moore whisper. "Better than a pistol shot. On, my lad, before they've time to guess what we're at."

They could see the guns looming in the darkness, and, running at the top of their speed, they succeeded in spiking a couple of the largest. They then crept back to the nullah. Just as they reached it a volley was fired close to them. It was doubtful, however, whether those who fired knew that the little band of Englishmen were near. The muskets must have been fired at random out of pure nervousness, for not one of the party was hit.

CHAPTER XV

WAITING FOR NEILL AND HIS "LAMBS"

THE next day a grand attempt to storm the entrenchment was made, but Nana Sahib did not appear. The wily wretch had too much regard for his own skin. He wanted to show his followers that he was a man of undaunted courage, and after announcing with much bombast that he was going to lead the army to the attack, he gave instructions to certain confidential friends to announce that the Nana might not expose his sacred head in battle, as, in the event of his fall, the army would have no one to look to. Thus the rascal preserved his character for bravery, without encountering danger.

When the attack was begun, the defenders were surprised to see that their immediate assailants were an undisciplined mob of Hindoos and Mussulmans, who had been assembled in the city to give courage and confidence to the sepoys. The Mahomedans had been called together under the green flag, and the day having been decided by the priest to be a propitious one, they marched to the sepoy camp. But as it was found that the Mahomedans did not turn

up in sufficient numbers, the Hindoo flag was hoisted, and the proclamation, while calling upon the Hindoos to join, stated that "every Hindoo who does not join the righteous cause, is an outcast. May he eat the flesh of cows!" and a good deal more to the same effect.

The sepoys put this motley mob in front, their idea being to let them receive the first fire of the English guns, and then advance to the charge under cover of the cowering budmash.

The little force inside the entrenchment was on the alert. The batteries were under the command of the gallant Lieutenant Ashe, Lieutenant Eckford, Lieutenant Dempster, and the intrepid Lieutenant Delafosse. Between the batteries men were stationed, fifteen paces apart, and sheltered by the wall. Each man had at least three loaded muskets by his side, with bayonets fixed, in case of assault. Some of the trained men had as many as seven, and even eight, muskets each.

Colonel Waring took his place with the rest of the men. All difference in rank was forgotten. The old soldier looked in at the thatched barrack on his way to his post. Ruth ran to meet him, and flung her arms round his neck.

"Dear Colonel Waring," she cried, "let me go with you. It's terrible waiting here helpless, and not knowing anything."

"What, in Heaven's name, can you do, my dear?" exclaimed the Colonel blankly.

"I can load muskets for you," she whispered.

The old man did not at once reply. He stared at the girl in amazement.

"By God, you're right, my girl," said he, at last huskily. "You're a soldier's daughter, and you'll fight and die, if need be, like a soldier. Come!"

Not another word was said. The brave English girl, erect and dauntless, followed the old man to the wall, and took her place by his side.

"As soon as I have fired a musket, re-load it."

The veteran spoke sternly, and with a soldier's air of command. His eyes shone with a wild, fierce light, such as Ruth had never seen in them before. She was conscious of a change even in herself. Their old relations had changed: they were now comrades fighting for their lives.

Ruth knew perfectly well how to load a musket, and she was so expert, and the old Colonel fired so rapidly, that in less than five minutes the guns became too hot to hold without great pain. Apart from the heat caused by the firing, the sun made the barrels as though they had been thrust in a furnace. The girl felt her hands becoming scorched; but she bravely endured the torture, and Waring, who was shooting as coolly as though he were knocking over pheasants, every bullet bringing down its man, never had to wait for a loaded weapon.

It was soon seen that the rabble had no heart for fighting. They halted at about two hundred yards from the entrenchment wall, and no efforts of the sepoys behind could induce them to advance a single inch farther. The fire of the defenders was wildly returned, but only with

muskets. The spiking of the guns the previous night rendered the guns unusable.

Suddenly a terrific roar of cannon was heard from Ashe's battery. The grape-shot tore its way through the crowd, dealing death and destruction. Shrieks of terror rent the air, and the next moment the whole host turned tail, and took to their heels in every direction.

"Done 'em, by God," muttered the Colonel, smiling grimly. "The rascals won't forget this lesson. If we only had a few shells!"

The old officer was right. By some terrible omission no shells had been stored. The result was that the sepoy force were able gradually to advance their batteries day by day nearer the entrenchment. But for this, the gallant little garrison might have held out.

Colonel Waring ceased to fire. It was but wasting ammunition. Besides, a score or so of the men stationed in the outside barracks had rushed out in pursuit. They were cutting and slashing till their arms ached, and friends and foes were mixed. The Colonel turned to where he had left Ruth. She had disappeared, and he looked across to the thatched barrack, expecting to see her under the verandah. But he was mistaken. Then he heard the next man, stationed fifteen paces from him, give a shout, and saw him leap over the wall.

Waring looked across the parapet, and to his amazement beheld Ruth stooping over a native who was lying on the ground. A wounded sepoy a few yards off, with a fiendish look on his face, was in the act of levelling his musket at her,

when the man who had leaped the wall foiled his intention with a vigorous bayonet thrust. The girl was quite unconscious of her peril.

"A narrow escape for you, miss!" growled Private Lyons, of the 32nd, the man who had run to her rescue. "You ought never to have come outside."

They were joined by Colonel Waring, who, to his amazement, saw that Ruth was binding up the arm of the native.

"My dear child," he cried half angrily. "What have we to do with wounded Hindoos? Haven't we enough wounded of our own?"

"Don't you see who it is?" cried Ruth. "Don't you know Frank Hale?"

"What!" ejaculated the Colonel.

"It's all right, Colonel Waring," said the wounded young man, in a faint voice, and in unmistakable English accents. "I never thought to reach here alive."

Frank Hale was the son of one of the principal merchants of Cawnpore. Many of the residents had not had time to get to the entrenchment when the Mutiny broke out, and sad indeed was their fate. Hale disguised himself as a native, and remained in hiding until the rabble were assembled to march upon the entrenchment. He then joined the crowd, hoping to find his way to his countrymen, running a fearful risk, not so much from the sepoys as from the bullets of the besieged. He had escaped both only at the last moment to have his arm gashed by the tulwar of a native who had recognised him. It was then that Hale had through an opening

in the wall, made by a round shot the day before, caught sight of Ruth, and shouted her name and his own. She heard him and crept out through the aperture.

The lad, he was scarcely more, was frightfully emaciated, and the loss of blood weakened him so much he fainted. He was carried into the thatched barrack; but there was no room for him in the apartment which had been converted into a hospital. It could not be said he had gained much by escaping into the entrenchment.

A gleam of hope crept into the hearts of the poor women at the news of the defeat of their assailants; but it soon faded. The handful of brave fellows who had ventured in pursuit had to return almost immediately, an overwhelming force of the enemy having assembled. The defeat could only be regarded as a temporary check; the next day the attack would most likely be renewed.

Frank Hale described the state of the city at the time of the outbreak as most appalling. It was, he said, as if the day of judgment had come. The European quarter was surrounded by fire. Swarms of dusky natives, the labouring classes, the scum of the city, crowded in on all sides, plundering the houses, and getting drunk on the wines and spirits they found there.

On the following day, when the mutineers commenced the attack on the entrenchment, the state of things was worse. The 2nd Cavalrymen, in an excited state of bravado, galloped to and from the magazine at a tremendous rate, their swords jingling in their scabbards, their

horses' feet resounding on all sides, and throwing up clouds of dust. The soldiers seemed frenzied. Then guns of various sizes and ammunition wagons, drawn by Government bullocks, were taken from the magazine, to be used against the Englishmen who had once owned them.

Hale said that when the batteries opened fire it seemed as if the earth was turning upside down. Fear and trembling were on all sides, except among the mutinous troops, and the plunderers, who went about committing all kinds of atrocities. Meanwhile the work of cold-blooded murder of the Europeans who had not gone into the entrenchment, but hid themselves in places where they thought they would be safe, was carried on with unremitting ferocity. Natives, in many instances their own servants, betrayed them to the murderers. Mr. Mackintosh, a well-known resident of Cawnpore, and one of his sons dressed themselves like chowkardars, and remained amongst their servants for a day or two, but were soon recognised. Then they put on the dress of Brahmins and ran away, but on the road, being alarmed, got under a bridge, where some boys pointed them out to the sepoy, who dragged them from their hiding-place, and hacked them to pieces. Mrs. Mackintosh, a lady of seventy, was hiding in her washerwoman's house, but was discovered and taken before the Nana. Even so old and so helpless a woman was shown no mercy. She was beheaded. Not one of those who remained out of the entrenchment but was traced out and butchered.

There was no resistance, save in the case of a discharged drummer of the 2nd Infantry, who, with a few native Christians, took shelter in a small but strongly built flat-roofed house, the doors of which they barricaded with bricks and stones. Here they repelled during the whole of one day the attacks made upon them. But at night the wretches set fire to the thatched verandah at the sides of the house, and the gallant little band of heroes were burnt to death.

There was not a house in Cawnpore but what was searched. The murderers even went into the villages in the outlying districts, and hunted for Europeans. At Nujjubgurh, about sixteen miles to the east of Cawnpore, occurred one of those heroic episodes with which the Mutiny abounds, and which cannot be read without a thrill of admiration. Here Mr. Edward Greenway, with his aged mother, his wife and children, together with a friend, Mr. Hollings, sought refuge, thinking the rebels would not proceed so far away to molest them. Mr. Hollings was a capital shot, and determined, if attacked, to fight to the last.

On the approach of the murderous rabble, all the inmates of the house ascended to the upper part, where, from a terrace which ran round the building, Mr. Hollings opened fire. So good was his aim, that he killed and wounded some sixteen of the budmash. The news of his gallant resistance reached the Nana, and a detachment of troops was dispatched from Cawnpore to take the household prisoners.

By the time the sepoy arrived, Mr. Hollings

had exhausted all his ammunition, and when he found he could fight no more, he sat down on one of the balustrades, fully exposed to view, and called out to the troops to shoot him. Several shots were fired, and at last one struck him in the chest, and brought the brave fellow, head foremost, to the ground, and the fall completed his death. After this, the others gave themselves up, and would have been killed there and then, but a promise of high ransom by Mrs. Greenway saved their lives.

A Portuguese merchant named De Gama, who did not think General Wheeler's entrenchment strong enough, hid in a house, where he was discovered, and taken before the Nana, with whom he used to have extensive dealings. As he knew the Nana so well, he thought his life would be spared. Vain hope! The wretch turned his face away in anger, and one of his followers interpreting his expression immediately drew his sword, and struck De Gama three or four times with it. The poor fellow fell bleeding to the ground, and a few more strokes finished him.

A family named Jacobie contrived to cross the river at night, and remained under cover of long grass on the banks. They were discovered and sent to the Nana, Mr. Jacobie dying of sunstroke on the way. Mrs. Jacobie was a woman of high courage, and defied the Nana to his face, reproaching him for the cold-blooded murders he had committed. She told him it was an act of cowardice to kill helpless women and children, and that she and her children had

done nothing to offend him in any way, and if he thought that by killing her and others England would become empty, he was greatly mistaken. Mrs. Jacobie's bold speech had the effect of shaming the Nana and all present, and she was ordered to be sent to the Sowada Kothi with her children, there to be kept prisoners along with old Mrs. Greenway.

Besides the slaughter of Europeans and Eurasians, many Hindoos and Mahomedans, suspected of aiding or serving the British force, were put to death. A list was made of all the bankers, who were shorn of their wealth, and property of every description was plundered or wantonly destroyed. Any attempt to carry intelligence or supplies to the besieged was punished with death or mutilation of the hand or nose, by the order of the Nana or his diabolical lieutenant, Azimoolah Khan.

Everything which poor Frank Hale had to tell was listened to with feelings of horror, heightened by the thought that the fate of these victims might be theirs also. Despair had begun to spread through the entrenchment, and it needed all General Wheeler's persuasion and calmness to prevent the women giving way to frenzied lamentations.

"Help must reach us before the 14th," said stout Sir Hugh. "The messages I received on the eve of the outbreak told me that Neill was on his way with the Madras Fusiliers. Two hundred—nay, one hundred—of Neill's 'Lambs' would suffice."

And the drooping spirits of the poor creatures

revived at the thought that on the 14th an end would come to their miseries. Nothing but this hope buoyed them up.

The day after the failure of the rebel assault the fight was renewed. The sepoys could be seen bringing more guns, and an incessant musketry fire was poured into the entrenchment from the nearest corner, while the guns sent their shot without intermission against the brick walls of the buildings. It was marvellous, indeed, that they held together.

This was June 11, and on that day the torture was increased by a fresh horror. Those in the thatched roof barrack were suddenly startled by hearing shrieks proceeding from the other buildings. The next minute terrified women and children were seen crowding out of the door, and running across the open space to the thatched barrack. The fear of the shots, which, as usual, were flying all round, was for the moment overcome by a new alarm.

"The barracks are on fire!" was the agonised reply to the frenzied questioners.

It was quite true, but the disaster was not so great as was imagined. A quantity of clothes in one of the rooms had indeed become alight, but the fire was soon extinguished, not, however, before a panic had arisen. Unfortunately, the result of this stampede was that the thatched barrack, already crowded to excess, was filled to suffocation, for the timid women refused to go back.

Up to this time some slight shelter from the missiles had been obtained by standing at the

angles of the walls, and in the archways of the doors ; but now, with fresh numbers crowding in, some were forced into the centre of the apartment, where already was a great gash in the roof.

Among those who were thus compelled to change their position was a lady who held the hand of her little son, a handsome boy of five, tightly in her own. Scarcely had they gone a couple of yards towards the middle of the room, than something struck the roof with a deafening crash, and an 18-pounder fell, killing the boy instantly. The wail of grief which burst from the lips of the agonised mother went to the hearts of all, oppressed as they were already with the intensity of unspeakable misery.

This was only one of the dramatic bereavements which happened during this awful time. It was immediately after the death of the poor little chap that Captain Seppings, the officiating deputy-paymaster, wrote a melancholy record, which was afterwards found on the wall. He was standing under one of the door arches, with wife and children, quite calm and collected, and endeavouring to encourage the ladies with him. After kneeling down and praying, he took out a pencil and wrote on the wall :

"The following were in this barrack on June 11, 1857: Captain Seppings, Mrs. ditto, three children, Mrs. Wainwright, ditto infant, Mr. Cripps, Mrs. Halliday."

This 11th of June seemed fated to produce surprises. Captain Seppings had just replaced the pencil in his pocket, when another piercing

shriek of a female was heard. Two soldiers' wives were seen hastily moving to a corner in a side room where there was a cot, and pointing to it. Quick as lightning, Sergeant Loveland rushed forward, and dragged out a most hideously loathsome figure of a native, blackened and scorched all over, as if burnt with fire.

"You demon!" hissed the sergeant between his teeth, as he dragged the wretch across the floor to the verandah.

Every one shuddered. They knew the lot in store for this incendiary. The sound of a pistol fired on the verandah told that justice had been short and sharp. No one could tell how the fellow came to be in the barrack. It was, however, settled that he had something to do with the fire in the flat-roof barrack, for a box of matches was found on the body, and doubtless he intended to set fire to the other barrack also.

When the alarm had subsided, some of the women were persuaded to return to the shelter from which the fire had driven them. The journey back through a hailstorm of bullets had to be made. It was done; but such were the nervousness and excitement, many forgot their apartments, and took up fresh quarters. Children were separated from their parents, wives from husbands, and the wretchedness and anguish of mind, if such a thing were possible, were increased.

As the afternoon of the 11th wore on, the battle waxed very hot, and at about five o'clock several desperate attacks were made by the mutineers. Thousands of armed men were

spread about under every corner available, their muskets and bayonets only perceptible, and firing as fast as they could load. Their batteries threw in hot shell, and grape, tearing and crashing. The walls, the supporting timbers, the roofs, the verandahs were rapidly becoming tottering ruins. The din of this fearful cannonading and musketry was so incessant, lasting nearly a couple of hours, that it resembled continuous claps of thunder in a tremendous storm.

But throughout all this the sepoys dared not show themselves. When the line of the unfinished barracks outside the entrenchment became filled with the mutineers, creeping up one by one, a gallant band, under Captain Jenkins, or the intrepid Moore, or Mowbray Thompson, would sally out from barracks Nos. 2 and 4, and with musket and sword clear these shelters of the foe. Scores of the enemy were cut down, for they never stopped to fight—they were in too great a funk. When they were driven out into the open the men behind the entrenchment wall marked them, and very few escaped with their lives.

At last the end of the terrible day came, and many were the fervent prayers offered up for the speedy coming of Neill. Only three days more, the poor women tried to comfort themselves with saying, and he would be in sight with his "Lambs."

But the 14th came, and no Neill appeared. Then, indeed, despair was close at hand.

CHAPTER XVI

WHY HELP DID NOT COME TO CAWNPORE

MEANWHILE Colonel Hamilton with his small army of relief, and with Philip Heron attached to his staff, was pushing his way to Benares, the Holy City of the Brahmins, with as much speed as the innumerable obstacles would permit.

The troops travelled along the Grand Trunk Road, which, nine hundred miles in length, runs from Calcutta to Delhi. It is one of the few noteworthy results of the East India Company's rule, and in parts is a very fine piece of engineering work. The difficulty was the deficiency of traction power. The supply of horses broke down three days after leaving Raneegunge; bullocks were not to be thought of, and it was only by a mixture of persuasion and threats that natives were induced to drag the dāk carriages.

They reached the river Soane, about a hundred miles from Benares, to find that the river was nearly dry, and that to ferry across was impossible. The coolies refused to go any farther, and bullocks had to be hired. Seven mortal hours were spent in crossing the river-bed, the animals occasionally sinking above their knees in the wet sand, and refusing to move.

The native drivers plied the whip remorse-

lessly; they poured out benediction and malediction with equal volubility. The animals were their children, their sons, their brothers, their good uncles, their esteemed brothers-in-law. They were gentlemen; they were pigs; they were princes; they were dogs, and so were their ancestors for several thousands of years. Macintyre cursed them in Gaelic, Major Tim Cassidy addressed them in the vernacular of the Dublin slums. Heron tried the effect of a little of the Turkish slang he had heard used in the Crimea. The bullocks were impervious to all.

"Begorrah, if we only had a Welshman among us now," exclaimed Cassidy. "I'm tould that there's no animal breathing can stand being sworn at in Welsh."

The officers had plenty of time during that intermediate passage of the river to sketch the romantic fortress of Rhotasghur, which, with a grim picturesqueness of its own, stands out a notable landmark on the river-bank; but not one was in the mood for sketching. Vague rumours had reached them from Benares. Neill, it was asserted, had been compelled to stay there instead of pushing on to Cawnpore. The news came from a Company's agent at one of the refreshment bungalows—a solitary instance of a man who had not deserted his post.

These refreshment bungalows had been built by the Indian Government for the accommodation, at fixed rates, of the higher grades of travellers. A bungalow of this kind generally contained two separate suites of apartments—a dining, sitting, and bedroom, a dressing- and a

bath-room—the last not being the least valued by the dusty traveller. The furniture was not more than a bed, a table, two or three chairs, and the bathing-room apparatus. The establishment of servants consisted of a khansuman, or steward, a bearer, a cook, and a sweeper.

But with the exception of the one mentioned, all the refreshment bungalows were desolate. The soldiers ransacked one or two in the hopes of finding something in the larders, but they were literally empty. Not even a chicken, the invariable adjunct of these bungalows in peaceful times, was to be found. The custodians, panic-stricken, had fled. There were other ominous signs of revolt. Bad news must have come from Benares, for the villages along the line of route were peopleless. Tired of the snail-like progress of the bullocks, Colonel Hamilton sent out a foraging party in search of natives to draw the dâk carriages, and, thanks to the high pay offered, this effort was successful.

Philip Heron saw by the appearance of the men that he was really in the North-West Provinces. The natives of the Doab were fine, stalwart fellows—very different from the slim and undersized Bengalis. Their clothes, too, were better. In place of the dirty whity-brown rags of the Lower Provinces, they wore coloured garments gracefully adjusted.

The nearer the party got to Benares the more confirmatory was the evidence that the mutiny must have broken out there. Still they could get no definite news. It was not until they saw in the pale light of the dawn the temples and

cupolas of the famous Brahminical city that they learnt what had happened.

During the heat of the day the dāk carriages were used. In the early morning and in the evening, until far into the night, the men walked, and so lightened the labour and hastened the progress. Travelling by dāk is a process of locomotion only now to be seen in remote parts of India. A dāk may be described roughly as a large palanquin running on four big wheels. Round the roof is a railing for the more secure accommodation of such luggage as cannot be packed outside. The interior is lined with strong woollen stuff; the dāk carriage is of considerable length, and there is space in it for a great many odds and ends.

Some ten miles from Benares, Heron, with Cassidy and Macintyre, were tramping ahead of the main body, when they saw a horseman cantering along the dusty road, followed by a dozen or so mounted men. The leader shouted, waved his hand, and put his horse to a gallop.

"Hurrah!" he called out heartily, when he was near enough. "Welcome, Ross-shire Buffs! I'm Jim Ellicott, of the 'Lambs.'"

"Bedad! more tiger than lamb, I'll go bail," said Tim. "You may as well know us by name. Here's Donald Macintyre, the best fellow that ever breathed—ye'd say so, too, if you saw Donald with a dhrop of whisky inside of him—t'other is Phil Heron, a Balaclava boy; and I'm meself—that is, I'm Tim Cassidy, of the 64th. What's up at Benares?"

"Nothing just now but hanging niggers and

burning villages," rejoined Ellicott, with a grim smile. "We've had a sharp time of it; but Neill hasn't got a tender hand, and the pandies are finding it out."

"And where's the Colonel?" asked Macintyre.

"Gone to Allahabad. Started over a fortnight ago with forty-three of the Fusiliers."

"And has he reached there safely?"

"You bet," answered Ellicott—better known as "big Jim Ellicott"—in a confident tone. "If there's a way to do a thing, John Neill's the man to find out that way. Mind you, we've heard no news of him since he started; but he's all right, I'll swear."

"Eh, man, but is all quiet at Allahabad?" asked Macintyre. "It's the most important military station on the Ganges, ye see, and the wurrst protected."

"That's so," said Ellicott. "Anyhow, we'd heard that nothing was very wrong when Neill set out; but, to tell you the truth, the sepoys have done their work of interrupting the communications better than usual."

This was quite true, as Heron afterwards discovered. The telegraph wire between Allahabad and Benares had been cut, and the dāk carriages smashed into fragments by the mutineers. Later on the "lightning dāk," as the natives called the telegraph, was made use of in a fashion never dreamt of by its original constructors. Some of the more ingenious of the sepoys discovered that the hollow iron posts which supported the wires would make a good

substitute for guns, and that the wire cut up in pieces could be fired instead of lead.

"Do you think Neill is making his way to Cawnpore?" said Heron.

Big Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"I should think not. He's left more than half his force at Benares. What can he do with forty-three men? They can't spare a man at Allahabad. No; he won't move a step till we push up from Benares. It's a good thing you fellows have come; it'll relieve the work a bit."

"Have you heard from Cawnpore?" went on Heron anxiously.

"Not a word. How could we? Haven't I told you that communications have been cut off for nearly three weeks?"

Three weeks! What might not happen in three weeks? The reports already received showed that wherever the rebellion broke out it spread with lightning-like rapidity. It was not a question of days, but of hours. It seemed to Heron of far more importance to push on to Cawnpore than to linger at Benares, where Neill's stern reprisals had already had their effect.

"Yes, I know," exclaimed Ellicott impatiently, when Heron pointed this out. "But I can only obey orders. The Colonel's made me hangman in ordinary, and, by Heaven, I'm doing my duty. What do you think of a row of three gibbets with three ropes to each? Wholesale, isn't it?" And stern Jim Ellicott rode away to meet Colonel Hamilton and Major Stirling, and left the others to go on towards Benares.

Just as the party had come in view of the

famous ghauts, which, the river being low, seemed of a towering height, another officer from Benares, Captain Jervis, met them, and told what had happened during the past fortnight. It seemed that when Neill arrived at Benares, he intended starting with a detachment for Cawnpore on the following afternoon ; but shortly before the appointed time, intelligence was received from Lieutenant Palliser (who had been sent to Azimgurh, fifty-six miles east of Benares, to bring away the treasure there) of an outbreak in this place.

The story was exaggerated, but it had the effect of causing much uneasiness at Benares. Brigadier Ponsonby consulted with Neill, and, doubts being entertained by the brigadier as to the loyalty of the 37th Native Infantry, he proposed that their muskets should be taken from them, leaving them, however, their side-arms. The Sikhs and the 13th Native Infantry, also stationed at Benares, were believed to be staunch. Neill was not in favour of this half-and-half course. He urged immediate and complete disarmament, and eventually the brigadier gave way.

At 5 p.m. Neill was on the ground with 150 of Her Majesty's 10th, sixty Madras Fusiliers, three guns, and thirty men. At this time no intimation had been received by any officer that the corps was disposed to mutiny. On the contrary, Colonel Spottiswoode, the commanding officer of the 13th, declared that his European non-commissioned staff "observed nothing doubtful in the conduct of the men, but that up

to the last moment every man was most obedient and civil to all authorities."

"What happened exactly," said Jervis, "I don't quite know, and I don't believe anybody else does. It was an awful muddle, that's all I can tell. Brigadier Ponsonby was attacked with sunstroke, and Colonel Spottiswoode and Colonel Neill did not seem of the same mind; so what with one and what with the other, the sepoys were driven wild with panic. I hope I may never see such a sight again. And the worst of it is, I don't believe the beggars intended to mutiny. The fact was, we made too much fuss about the disarmament, and they thought we were all in a funk, and intended to shoot the lot."

"But ye haven't told us yet what they did, man?" said Macintyre, with the quiet persistency of the Scotchman.

"It was this way. The 37th were drawn up in front of their lines, with the cannon pointed at them. Our fellows were posted within musket range, and the Sikhs and 13th Cavalry within sight. You see, the 37th, finding themselves hemmed in with musketry and artillery, of course thought they were going to be blown to pieces, and all that the officers could do didn't remove the impression. That was the beginning of the business."

"And then?" said Heron.

"Well, the men were ordered to put their arms into the little stone buildings which we call kotes, and they obeyed. It was all right up to that time; but when they saw the 10th marching to the kotes to secure the muskets, they went into a sort of frenzy, and made a rush

for the kotes. Our fellows ran, too, and it was neck and neck for a time; but somehow the pandies got there first, and then it was like putting a match to a magazine. They opened fire upon their own officers, kneeling and taking deliberate aim. Just think of it! Yet, upon my soul, I believe ten minutes before they hadn't the slightest intention of doing anything of the kind."

"They just ran amuck, ye mean?" said Macintyre.

"That's it. Major Barrett, who thought they had been unfairly treated, shouted that he would remain with them, and share their fate. It made no difference. Their blood was up, and while some fired upon Barrett, others attacked him with their bayonets. The same with the sergeant-major. They were only saved by a guard of faithful sepoys, who got them away. While this was being done, poor Captain Guise, of the 13th Cavalry, was riding across the parade-ground, and fell riddled with bullets."

"The scoundrelly blauguards!" cried Tim Cassidy, his moustache bristling. "I knew poor Guise, and, by Heaven, I'll avenge his death!"

"You needn't trouble, major," said Jervis quietly, "his loss has long since been requited in Hindoo blood. Dodgson, who was appointed in Guise's place, very nearly met the same fate. When he told the troopers he'd been sent to command them, they broke into a low murmur and flashed their swords. 'God!' I exclaimed to Ellicott, 'the cavalry are turning traitors!' The words were scarcely out of my mouth, when one of the fellows raised a pistol and fired

at Dodgson. The bullet grazed the funny-bone of his sword-arm, and his hand dropped as if it were paralysed. Then the rascal who fired the pistol rushed to cut him down; but another man got in the villain's way, and Dodgson just escaped by the skin of his teeth."

"But what in the name of Heaven were our men doing all this time?" exclaimed Heron.

"Why, returning the fire of the mutineers. It was a confoundedly unfair fight, for our men were in the open, while the rebels were skulking behind the kotes, and firing from these shelters. But our turn was to come. When the cavalry broke loose, the Sikhs were seized with the contagion, and rushed madly on the guns. Captain Olpherts was ready. He wheeled round his guns splendidly, and poured a shower of grape into the beggars. This staggered 'em a bit, but they came on again with fiendish yells, and this time they were joined by the cavalry and the 37th. R-r-r-rh! went Olpherts' guns a second time, and this was enough. The sum total was that the 37th were utterly smashed, and the cavalry and the Sikhs frightened out of their wits. The whole lot turned tail and went off."

"Where to?" said Heron.

"Ah, there's the worst of it! I'm afraid they've gone to Allahabad to spread the rebellion, and from Allahabad they may make a dash for Cawnpore and Lucknow. I call this Benares business most unfortunate. I'm sure it might have been avoided."

This was indeed disquieting. It was no satisfaction to any one to know that Neill had been

flogging and hanging without stint at Benares. If Jervis was right in his opinion that the sepoy at Benares had been forced by misapprehension into mutiny, what a responsibility might rest upon those who had blundered ! Yet who could have foretold the appalling consequences of that fatal delay at Benares ? The fierce outbreak at Allahabad—an outbreak marked by one of the most cold-blooded acts of atrocity that that terrible time could show—was perhaps a natural sequel ; but no one could conceive the horror of Cawnpore, the dastardly treachery of the Nana, and his still more treacherous lieutenant, Azimoolah Khan.

The little body of troops entered Benares in something like a procession. The European residents turned out to meet them. The natives, who swarmed in the narrow streets, looked sullenly upon the men of the 64th, and wonderingly at the Highlanders. The dress of the latter puzzled them not a little.

In spite of the anxious thoughts which were ever present in his mind, Philip Heron could not help being impressed by the picturesqueness, the wealth of glowing colour, the teeming life of Benares. It was still the early morning when the party reached the interior, yet the city was all astir. They threaded lanes and alleys so narrow that they could hardly force their way through the crowd ; high buildings lined these lanes on each side, and, judging from the squalor and filth of the thoroughfares, no one would imagine that these high buildings concealed stately gardens and spacious quadrangles.

Looking from the tall, slender minarets of Aurungzebe's mosque, the city is seen to spread itself out like a map, divided into sections by thin, tortuous lines. In the broad spaces between the lines are the secluded retreats, hidden by the high buildings and walls bordering the narrow streets. Some of these retreats are remarkably beautiful, surrounded by stone cloisters decorated with a profusion of ornament and flanked by high towers. The smaller ones are laid out in parterres of flowers, with fountains in the centre, and all are tenanted by numerous birds of the brightest plumage.

When passing through the gate leading into the city they heard a sound strange to English ears—the voice of a priest calling the muezzin. To Benares, the "Holy City," come shoals of pilgrims, and crowds of beggars of every description blocked up the entrances to the various sacred buildings. Many of these mendicants were most hideous and repulsive. Maimed and distorted figures, their injuries mostly self-inflicted, jostled against the visitors, begging for alms. Numbers of these miserable wretches had no covering whatever, except a coating of mud and chalk; while their long, untrimmed beards and hair were matted with filth.

"Begorrah!" exclaimed Cassidy, with a shudder of disgust, "let's get out of this. Ugh, you beast. Hang me if you're not too disgusting for even the point of my toe to touch you, or I'd kick you out of the way!" This was to a particularly objectionable fakir, who suddenly protruded an indescribably horrible hand, the

nails of which extended inches beyond the finger-tips.

Quarters were assigned to the new-comers, and they were not sorry to sit down in a roomy bungalow to breakfast—the first good meal they had had since they had left Calcutta. Of course, they soon fraternised with the officers of Her Majesty's 10th, and naturally the talk was of nothing but what had happened in the city. Then the all-important question came. Were they to push on to Allahabad, or should they be ordered to remain at Benares? To Heron the decision was of vital moment, and he impatiently awaited the return of Macintyre, who was attending upon Colonel Hamilton. Old "Wattie" and Major Stirling were in conference with Colonel Spottiswoode. Macintyre joined his comrades in the afternoon, and was immediately surrounded. His resolute face was decidedly gloomy.

"We've got to stay here, laddies, among the filthy pilgrims. The Fusiliers are moving as rapidly as they can up to Allahabad. We're to follow them, but not until Havelock arrives."

"And when will that be?" Heron asked.

No one could say. It was indeed useless at the moment to hazard an opinion upon anything dependent upon time. Fate, with persistent malignancy, seemed to be pursuing the military and civilians shut up in Cawnpore, and everything went wrong.

Thus Colonel Neill with a good portion of his men arrived at Benares on June 3, the day before the Cawnpore sepoy broke out into open mutiny.

Neill had intended starting for Cawnpore the afternoon of the day after reaching Benares. Had he done so the horrors of the Cawnpore tragedy would never have occurred.

But for this delay Neill was not in the least to blame. According to the latest news from the doomed city, there did not appear to be any immediate danger. True, on May 27 General Wheeler wrote: "All quiet; but I feel by no means confident it will continue so"; but this was no more than might be expected, and it did not appear to warrant any urgent necessity for pushing on to Cawnpore in view of the unrest at Benares itself, where, as already related, Neill within two days after his arrival had his hands full.

It was strange, in spite of over a century of British rule in India, that we knew so little of the inner workings and life of the native, whether Hindoo or Mahomedan. The rapid transmission of news from village to village, from city to city, was one of the mysteries never solved. There seemed to be a secret mail, but of its mechanism Europeans knew nothing. It is indisputable that outbreaks occurred within a few hours in places many miles distant from each other. One outburst seemed to precipitate a second and a third, yet the intervals of time were so brief as to preclude the possibility of news being conveyed by ordinary means.

The closeness of the dates of the various revolts would indicate something more than a mere coincidence. On May 30 the troops at Lucknow and Bareilly mutinied; on the 31st they broke

out at Budaon, and Shahjehanpore. On the 3rd occurred the butchery of the officers and residents at Seetapore ; on the 4th the outbreaks at Cawnpore and Benares. On the very day when the "loyal" 6th were murdering their officers at Allahabad the sepoy at Jhansi were revelling in massacre. On that day also Nana Sahib, with a politeness truly fiendish in its irony, intimated by letter to Sir Hugh Wheeler his intention of opening fire upon the entrenchments !

This coincidence of attack argues in favour of a well-thought-out and carefully arranged scheme of rebellion, but of such a scheme there is very little direct evidence. Even allowing there must have been a plan, the details must have been upset by the premature outbreak at Meerut. But excepting at Cawnpore, where the Maharajah had a definite grievance, and had for years been whetting his appetite for vengeance, it is difficult to find a well-founded case of a definite policy on the part of the mutineers. However this may be, it is certain that the rebels when defeated at one place knew well enough where to hasten to assist other revolting centres.

After Neill had done his best to quell disorder at Benares, he had the rising at Allahabad to cope with, and here his difficulties were tremendous. He found that the authorities had done nothing. They had laid in no supplies ; they had made no preparation for the transport of troops to Cawnpore and Lucknow, where help was so sorely needed. They had not even attempted to open communication with Cawnpore,

and knew nothing of the terrible straits to which the devoted garrison was reduced. Yet Cawnpore was but 120 miles distant, and this fact makes it more poignant to think of the heroism of the men, and the patience and endurance of the women during that ghastly three weeks of bloodshed and terror from the 6th to the 27th, and of that dark and unspeakable tragedy of July 16.

Again we say no fault can be laid at the door of Neill. He worked like a Trojan; and had he known of the state of affairs at Cawnpore, he would have made a dash for the beleaguered garrison, small and inadequate as his force was. When tidings at last reached him he vigorously engaged in preparations for sending a relief force, and he wrote to Sir Henry Lawrence on the 18th, and also on the 23rd, telling him he was about to dispatch immediately 400 Europeans and 300 Sikhs to the assistance of Cawnpore.

Once more the Fates intervened. Cholera broke out in Allahabad. The supply of medicine and medical appliances was, like everything else in the city, very deficient; and when Neill was in a position to make a definite move it was discovered that there were but sixteen dhoolies or litters available, although a considerable number of these was a primary essential for the projected expedition, and that all materials for making others were wanting, as well as workmen. Neill had to telegraph to head-quarters for a supply, and, cruel irony of Fate, the order was given at Calcutta on the very day of the capitulation of Cawnpore!

CHAPTER XVII

NO SURRENDER !

JUNE 14 came and went, and the poor, half-starved, wounded, rapidly diminishing garrison knew nothing of Neill's movements, nor the cause of his delay.

On the evening of that day General Wheeler wrote to Sir Henry Lawrence at Lucknow describing his position. He said : " The whole Christian population is with us in a temporary entrenchment, and our defence has been noble and wonderful, our loss heavy and cruel. We want aid—aid ! If we had 200 men we could punish the scoundrels and aid you."

Pathetic and simple words, but the hope they expressed was vain. Sir Henry Lawrence was himself at that moment sorely pressed, the mutiny having broken out in Lucknow.

General Wheeler's letter, however, was sent, and it may be wondered how, when hemmed in by a merciless and vigilant enemy, he could contrive to dispatch letters. Communications, however, continued to be conveyed until June 24, when Lieutenant-Colonel Wiggins wrote the last letter received from Cawnpore by messengers retained by Mr. Martin Gubbins, the financial commissioner for Oudh. What answer Sir

Henry returned to General Wheeler's appeal for aid is not known. Whatever it was, it must have filled the brave old man with despair. Sir Henry Lawrence, writing to Mr. Tucker, the Commissioner of Benares, on June 16, said :

" I would risk the absence of so large a portion of our small force, could I see the prospect of its being able to succour Sir Hugh Wheeler. But no individual here cognisant of facts—except Mr. Gubbins—thinks that we could carry a single man across the river, as the enemy holds all the boats, and completely commands the river. May God Almighty defend Cawnpore, for no help can we afford ! . . . I have sent the pith of this to Colonel Neill to urge him to relieve Cawnpore, if in any way possible."

The words, " The enemy holds all the boats, and completely commands the river," were of terrible significance, as will be seen later on, but at the time Sir Henry wrote he only had regard to the conveyance of troops. But they meant more—far more—than this.

It was of course very early recognised that the river was of supreme importance, and on hearing of the outbreak at Cawnpore, Sir Henry directed Captain Evans, the officer stationed at Onao (twelve miles from Cawnpore, to secure all the boats he could. But the mutineers had forestalled us by breaking up the bridge at Cawnpore, and taking possession of the boats which had composed it, as well as those at other ferries on the farther side of the stream. Thus it will be evident that there was not a gleam of hope anywhere ? Forlorn indeed was the state

of the Cawnpore garrison, and heavy the thoughts of Sir Hugh Wheeler.

Every day the position became more terrible, for, failing in their attempts to take the entrenchment by storm, the rebels brought more heavy guns from the magazine (if this magazine had been blown up as the gallant Willoughby blew up the magazine at Delhi!), and formed several most formidable batteries under cover of the night, as close as they could to the earthworks.

Eventually there were no fewer than seven of these batteries, in addition to a nullah a short distance to the north-west of the entrenchment, from which the enemy pushed on a sap, whence they poured in a near and deadly fire, and from this network of attack the rebels kept up their fire day and night; the heaviest cannonading being for about two hours in the morning, and the same in the evening, when each gun would throw between twenty and thirty shots an hour. The aim, too, was rapidly improving, especially as to the shells, which rarely overshot the mark.

June 13, the day before the expected succour by Neill, was a memorable and fatal one in the history of the siege. The enemy, failing to fire the barracks by means of incendiaries, began to use heated shells. At 5 p.m., when the hopes of relief were highest, a shell fired by a one-eyed soubadhar of artillery took effect. The marksman was a pensioner of the British, but he had no gratitude, and he complacently pocketed ninety rupees, which the Nana gave him for bringing about the worst calamity which had yet befallen the besieged, for the shell set fire

to the thatched roof, and, fanned by a strong breeze, spread with appalling rapidity.

When Colonel Waring saw the column of fire shoot upwards, followed by a roar and a crackle, and the screams of the terrified women and children, he was at the ramparts. Duty demanded that he should remain at his post, but the thought that a frightful fate awaited Ruth was too much for the old man. Flinging down his rifle, and, feeble as he was, he hurried to the blazing barrack. Those inmates who could move were endeavouring to escape through the only opening—a narrow doorway. They were panic-stricken, and one woman had fainted, blocking the way. The shrieks of those trying to force their way out were heart-rending.

The old officer dashed at the huddled mass, and seizing the woman nearest to hand dragged her out. Then he went for another and another, and by this time he had assistance—a slim active figure in a tattered shirt and trousers, his face and hands begrimed with powder. At last the entrance was cleared, and those behind had now a chance to escape.

“Quick! quick!” shouted the Colonel.

He stood at one side of the door, so as not to obstruct the outward rush; his newly arrived companion stood at the other, and they did their best to drag out the helpless ones. As Colonel Waring laid hold of each new-comer, he cast a hasty glance at her face. The one he sought he could not find. Then his firmness gave way.

“My God!” he gasped, “if she is to die, I will die with her.”

Frenziedly he made a dash for the interior, to be stopped at the doorway by the man on the other side, who flung his arms round the Colonel's waist, and hurled him backwards.

"Who are you?" shouted Waring. "Let me go, or by Heaven I'll——"

His disengaged hand went to his belt. But he had not time to seize his revolver. His assailant, with the adroitness of the expert wrestler, gave the old colonel a Cumberland "backheel," and in a second the latter was lying perfectly unhurt on the ground, and before he had time to rise his assailant had disappeared within the burning building. Here he showed, could any one have seen him, method in his madness. In a flash he had torn off one of his tattered shirt sleeves, and holding the rag to his nose and mouth, he crept farther and farther into the hot, choking atmosphere. The barrack was alight at the end away from the door. The flames enabled him to see dimly the shapeless forms of the poor victims who had been unable to escape, and who had died—mercifully, a painless death—of suffocation.

One woman was lying about a couple of yards from where he was swaying under the effects of the foul, poisonous air. He fancied he saw a slight movement of the prostrate form, and holding the rag tighter to his face with his left hand, he stretched out his right arm as far as he could reach, lying down his full length to do so. His fingers clasped an arm thin and delicate as that of a child. He dared not stand upright for fear of fainting, and that would mean death

to him and to the girl or woman whose wrist he was grasping. He slid backwards, propelling himself by his left elbow, and by his knees and feet, with a wriggling motion. His right hand never let go its hold, and gently he drew the woman towards the door. Whether he had succeeded in reaching the opening he did not know. A curious sensation of drowsy faintness, in which all things earthly seemed crumbling into chaos, crept over him. He knew no more.

But rescue was near at hand, though he was unconscious of it. When he opened his eyes, there was stout and tender-hearted John MacKillop of the Civil Service kneeling by his side, and moistening his forehead with a cloth dipped in a pitcher of water.

"Where am I?" came from his white lips.

"Whaur are ye? In the devil's den I'm thinking, puir laddie. I would I could say ye were anywhere else," said John sadly.

"But she—I had hold of some one's arm! Is she saved too?"

"Aye, aye, the puir lassie, though ye'd better ha'e letherbide. It's only waking to more misery."

"You're right; but tell me who is she?"

"Who is she? Who but Miss Ruth Armitage, an'—"

Dick Heron's eyes glistened.

"Thank Heaven," he muttered. "At least I've shown her that I'd die for her."

MacKillop caught the words and looked at him pityingly.

"Weel, we're a' doing much the same for each other, I'm thinking."

Yes, that was true, and no one had a better right to say so than John MacKillop. It was the duty of the brave fellow to fetch water from the well in the centre of the entrenchment, the only water-supply the garrison had. The well was also a target for the enemy's artillery, so that the appearance of a man with a pitcher by day and by night, and the creaking of the tackle were signals for a shower of grape. Many times had MacKillop carried his life in his hands until the journey came from which he never returned. Just now, despite the hail-storm of bullets—for the firing of the barrack had sent the rebels into devilish joy—John MacKillop had once more gone to the well, and brought water, to the salvation of Ruth Armitage and Dick Heron.

But what was the safety of two lives in the face of the appalling tragedy of that brief half hour? Death had hitherto been contented with single victims; but now there had been a wholesale immolation. Panic did its work, many of the wounded and sick could not be removed, and about forty were left to their fate.

There was no time for thought of oneself. Personal emotions, feelings, inclinations, love, were crushed. Self-sacrifice was the one thought uppermost. Dick, assured that Ruth was safe, did not seek to see her—indeed, he could not. As soon as he had pulled himself together he went to the earthworks to take his share at the guns or rifle.

The fateful day on which Neill was so confidently expected—June 14—was marked by a fiercer attack than the besieged had hitherto

experienced. On this day reinforcements arrived, and the object evidently was to take the entrenchment by storm. Its capture was to be the sequel to the firing of the barracks, but the rebels failed, as they had failed before. Again and again they tried to approach the feeble rampart, but were each time met with a vigorous fire from the batteries within, and at nightfall they gave up the attempt.

All through the frightful time General Wheeler, incapable of much active work, was thoughtful and kind. He could do but little, yet when the poor oppressed women saw his spare, worn, shrunken figure near them, they felt cheered, though they knew not why. He had taken his post with the others in the defence, and shared in the privations. There was no difference between his lot and that of the private soldier. After the fire the terrified women and children were huddled together behind a couple of wagons, and a heap of debris—packing cases, broken furniture and rubbish from the barracks—and here Sir Hugh found them. Like those of every one else, Sir Hugh Wheeler's clothes were dirty and torn, his face and hands were grimy, and he looked more like a vagrant who had tramped miles on a dusty road than a General in the British Army.

"There's only one place where at the moment you can go—the trenches in the south corner," said he to the women. "The attack just now is on the north and east. You'll be safe there. When night comes you shall be moved to one of the barracks outside."

The women heard this without a murmur, though they knew it meant exposure to the pitiless sun for two or three hours. Ruth was lying on a mat in the shadow cast by a wagon, Mrs. Widowson, the sturdy wife of a private of the 32nd, fanning and moistening her forehead with a damp rag. The General stopped and looked pityingly at her.

"Poor child," said he compassionately. He sighed deeply when he thought of his own daughters, who were also in the entrenchment.

The girl was in a half-unconscious state, but the voice of the General roused her. She struggled into a sitting position, and, pushing back her hair, which was streaming over her face, she cast a wild glance of entreaty at the gallant old soldier as he was moving away.

"Sir Hugh," she cried faintly, "do not go yet. I want to speak to you."

The General turned and sat down on a box by her side, so that she should not exhaust her strength by having to speak loudly. It was like his kindness.

"Sir Hugh," said she, fixing her large, sad eyes upon him, "how long is this horror to last?"

"Why ask me, my dear? I am certain that if our countrymen can reach us they will."

"Yes, yes; but they don't know how we are situated."

"That's the worst of it—they don't know. Colonel Neill ought to be at Allahabad before this. If we could only send a messenger to him!"

"Yes; I've been thinking of that, General Wheeler. Let me go!"

"Go? Go where?"

"To Allahabad. I can disguise myself as a native woman. I can speak Hindustani as I can my native tongue. Let me go!"

"Madness, my girl. You don't know what you're saying. No woman can make her way through that camp of tigers. You think because you know the Hindustani language that you also know the native manners and customs—customs which have been handed down from generation to generation. No, no; it would never do."

Ruth made no reply. She felt the old General was right.

"Neill ought to be here to-morrow—at the latest within a week," went on General Wheeler.

"And if not?"

"If not——" Sir Hugh drew a long breath. "You are able to answer that question quite as well as I can."

Again Ruth was silent, and the General was about to rise from his seat when the girl grasped his arm convulsively.

"I don't believe help will ever reach us, Sir Hugh—not, at least, before we are starved to death."

"We must hope for the best," was all the General could say.

"Many of us are past hope. We would gladly welcome death. I've been thinking there's one way which might help us. You're quite right in saying I could not get to Allahabad—I feel I

haven't the strength. But I might go to Bithoor—to Azimoolah Khan."

"Great Heavens! *That* man—that devil, I ought to say! What are you talking about?"

Ruth heard him unmoved. Her manner was the manner of one who had made a vow, and had sternly resolved to keep that vow. Without the slightest quiver in her voice, she told simply, almost mechanically, the story of Azimoolah Khan's offer, before the siege began, to save her.

"But," exclaimed the General, "is it possible you don't know what this offer meant?"

"I can guess," said Ruth faintly, and with downcast eyes. "I should probably not have gone to Allahabad, as Azimoolah promised, but to Bithoor—to the Nana's palace."

"Yes," said Sir Hugh with emphasis.

"I've been thinking that if I now accepted Azimoolah's offer he and the Nana might be induced to draw away their forces and let you and the others go free."

"And do you imagine that I, an English soldier, would consent to such a negotiation?" cried Sir Hugh agitatedly. "No; our liberty shall not depend upon such a sacrifice."

"What does my life matter when the lives of so many others would be saved?"

"Your life?" asked the old man, with a keen and searching look.

"Yes," returned the girl, with a sad ghost of a smile flitting over her brave face. "I should but deceive Azimoolah and dupe the Nana. When you were safely away I should kill myself. It would be very easy."

"Never—never—never," cried Sir Hugh. "My girl, if it be so willed that we die, the sooner death comes the better. Dismiss such thoughts from your mind."

The General spoke sternly, almost angrily. He thoroughly grasped the meaning of Ruth's suggestion, and he purposely roughened his tone to repress what he knew was the outcome of despair.

"Do not mention such a thing again," said he, as he turned away, "or"—and a grim smile lighted up his eyes and his tone softened—"I shall have to order you under arrest, and I can ill spare anybody for this purpose."

"Poor girl—poor girl!" he muttered to himself. "How will this terrible business end?"

That was the question all those devoted men and women were asking themselves. They had been shut up in the entrenchment nine days, and the time had been an eternity. The thousand souls had been reduced by at least one-fourth.

In her hurried talk with the General Ruth had lighted upon the keynote of all the trouble—the pangs of hunger and of thirst. The two things together were gradually driving the poor creatures mad.

Scarcely had the women and children (mostly the wives and families of the privates of the 32nd regiment) been removed to the trenches—almost the only places of shelter left—than one poor woman, who was in a wretched state, bordering on starvation, was seen to go out of the protection of the mud wall with a child in

each hand, and stand where the fire was heaviest, hoping that some bullet might relieve her and her little ones from the troubles they were enduring. She was brought back, poor thing, to die a more tedious death.

In the barracks outside the entrenchment they were worse off than inside the walls. To fetch food from within the entrenchment meant courting death, and after a time the gallant little band endeavoured to depend upon foraging outside the earthworks.

Now and then the larder was strengthened by the addition of some horse-soup when the enemy's cavalry came near enough to be "potted." It was of more importance to secure the horse than the rider, and the latter might go scot free so that the former was captured. Once a Brahmin bull strolled within range. He was floored at once, but he had to be brought in, and that was the difficulty.

A volunteer party was instantly formed, and Captain Moore, who was always present where any daring work was to be done, led the foragers. They took with them a strong rope, fastened it round the hind legs and between the horns of the beast, and in the midst of cheers from behind the mud wall, and a sharp fusillade from the rebels, mingled with round shots, they accomplished their object. Two or three ugly wounds were not thought too high a price to pay for this contribution to the commissariat.

Once the defenders of No. 2 barrack saw the sepoys bring a nine-pounder drawn by half a dozen bullocks up to No. 6 barrack. Captain

Mowbray Thompson's men would have given a right arm for a good cut out of the sides, and not a few of their officers would have bartered a letter of credit on the Army agents for the same privilege.

But in vain ; the sepoy's managed to get the bullocks under cover without coming into range. Just as everybody was anathematising all the bullocks and all the sepoy's in creation, a weedy horse belonging to one of the irregular cavalry was spotted. In an instant half a dozen Enfield rifles were levelled at the animal, and in less than five minutes he was down, brought into the barracks, and cut up. There was no skill wasted. Lump, thump, whack, went non-descript pieces on to the fire, and there was not one man there did not think roast horse the most savoury meal he had ever tasted. The two pickets, thirty-four in number, disposed of the horse in two meals. The head and some mysteries of the body were stewed, and the soup sent into the entrenchments as a present to the ladies.

Amid all this, death was ever present. Captain Halliday, who had come from the entrenchments to visit Captain Jenkins, was going back with some of the horse-soup for his wife, when he was shot down between the stone roof and the mud wall.

Once a stray dog wandered from the sepoy barrack, and every possible blandishment was employed by our men to tempt the canine adventurer into the soup-kettle. He yielded to the temptation, and was served up steaming hot.

It was not every one, in spite of the pangs of hunger, who could be induced to touch the dish.

The tortures of thirst were worse than those of hunger. The well in the entrenchments, as already mentioned, was one of the greatest points of danger, as the enemy invariably fired grape upon the spot the instant any person made his appearance there to draw water. Even in the dead of night the darkness afforded but little protection, as the sepoys could hear the creaking of the bucket; and at this well-known sound they instantly opened fire.

MacKillop was the chief volunteer for the fetching of water, but there were also paid men. These were chiefly privates, who got as much as eight or ten shillings a bucket. Poor fellows! their earnings were of little avail to them; and to their credit it must be said that when towards the last days of the siege money had lost its value, they were not less willing to incur the risk of drawing for the women and the children. And wearisome work it was, for the water was between sixty and seventy feet from the surface of the ground, and the mechanism was simply the primitive method of hand-over-hand.

On the 15th, when night came on, the onslaught recommenced with renewed ferocity. The enemy rushed onwards in hundreds, under cover of the darkness, with the evident intention of surrounding Ashe's battery, and taking it by storm. But Captain Ashe was far too old a soldier to be caught napping.

"Let them come," he muttered between his teeth, "the more the merrier. No, no!" he

called out softly to his men, "not yet. Wait till I give the word."

The sepoys could be seen in the gloom, stealing along like savage animals in search for their prey. The ground was literally covered with them.

"Not a word," breathed Ashe in a whisper, which his men heard, but which never went over the earthworks.

The rebels were allowed to crawl within sixty or eighty yards of the wall before a gun was fired or a movement made to show that they were seen. Just as they imagined their plan was successful, and they rose to their feet to make the charge, a nine-pounder, loaded with grape, was discharged with appalling effect. The scattering shot went right into their midst, and was followed by a withering musketry fire, every available man and gun having been concentrated on this spot. With a howl of disappointment and rage, the sepoys fell back. Their loss amounted to some hundreds, and they had no heart to renew the combat that night.

On the following day occurred an untoward incident, which did more than anything else to hurry the tragedy to its climax. It happened in this way: To the west of the entrenchment were three buildings. One of these buildings was the quarter-guard, which, after the burning of the thatched barrack, was used for a hospital for sick and wounded. The other two were sheds, called "go-downs," and in these were sheltered some of the wives and children of the soldiers. Now, the quarter-guard was

also used as a prison, and here some half-dozen sepoy (men who were under trial previous to the outbreak, and who had been brought into the entrenchment) were confined. Later on, had such men (they were undoubted traitors) been made prisoners, they would have been shot without loss of time ; but General Wheeler was a humane man, and mistaken mercy was shown them.

The fellows had been handcuffed and placed in charge of a sentry, but when the attack of the enemy grew fierce, this man had to take his turn at the earthworks, and the prisoners were left to be guarded by those wounded who were able to move about. The result may be anticipated. Three nights after the barrack was re-occupied three men escaped, and the consequence was very serious, for they immediately went to the Nana, and gave him every information as to the distressed state of the garrison, and on the following day, the 17th, the enemy's batteries commenced firing, not only on the burnt barrack, but also on the quarter-guard and the two go-downs.

Meanwhile it seemed almost as though the Fates were determined to prove of what British pluck and British endurance are capable. Not one bit of good luck did the besieged have all the way through, while the sepoy, on the other hand, were aided by persistently favourable fortunes.

Thus, on the 17th the enemy began to run short of percussion caps, and all the master smiths and native gunmakers were seized to turn the percussion locks into flint ones. Had this

state of things continued, the assault with musket shot must gradually have slackened, greatly to the advantage of the besieged. But some malignant power of spite and cruelty seemed to be watching over the mutineers, and just at the right moment for them a fleet of about twenty boats, laden with magazine stores and ammunition, reached Cawnpore.

These stores were intended to reinforce the British supplies, but the conductor on duty unfortunately was not aware of what was going on at Cawnpore till he came within four days' journey of that station, when the zemindars (native farmers) and others, seized the boats and sent them to the Nana. The two Europeans (conductor and sergeant in charge) were murdered without delay by order of the Nana, and the stores taken into the magazine. The water route up country is always very tedious, especially in the hot season, when the river is generally very low. Thus it must have taken nearly a month for this fleet to come up from Allahabad to Cawnpore.

So, with this accession to the supplies, the rebels renewed the attack with redoubled ferocity. And no help had come to the beleaguered garrison, nor was there any likelihood of any. But if Neill had only known ! That was the cruel part of the business. He had succeeded in restoring order in Allahabad on June 17, and had he had the slightest idea of the state of affairs at Cawnpore, he would have pushed on. He waited for Havelock. It was then too late—too late !

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF THE SIEGE

TOWARDS the latter part of the siege the guns had to be served by volunteers, the original fifty-nine artillerymen having all been killed or wounded. The guns themselves were terribly battered. One howitzer was completely knocked off its carriage; two had their sides driven in, and a fourth was without a muzzle. At last there were only two which by any ingenuity could be made to carry grape, and these were loaded in a most eccentric manner.

In consequence of the irregularity of the bore of the guns, through the damage inflicted, the canister could not be driven home. But woman's wit was equal to the necessity. They took off their stockings, and the contents of the canisters were emptied into the stockings, which were thus converted into a species of cartridge, novel but effective.

Every contrivance that experience could suggest, or ingenuity devise, was made use of. A small gun in barrack No. 1 in possession of the enemy, was particularly objectionable to Lieutenant Delafosse, who, being compelled to load his nine-pounder with six-pound shot, could never be sure of his mark. Delafosse did not

know what fear was, and whenever the gun was fired, he always jumped upon the heel of the carriage to satisfy himself that his shot had done some damage. Scores and scores of times he showed himself above the wall, but he seemed to bear a charmed life, for he not only surveyed the horrors of the siege, but ultimately escaped. At length the enemy's little gun exhausted his patience.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed angrily, when for about the thirteenth time his shot went wide of the mark, "I'll silence that little beast, or be silent myself ever after."

He gave his worn-out gun a monster charge, consisting of three six-pound shots and a stockingful of grape, all well rammed down. The faithful old gun did not burst, as might reasonably have been expected; the grape went straight to its destination, and the troublesome little antagonist was heard of no more.

But this piece of success was due to skill, and not to good luck. All the good luck went to the rebels, and all the bad to the British. Even the very elements seemed to have a deadly spite against the cooped-up garrison. This year the "hot wind" was of exceptional intensity. At times it was like the continuous blast of a heated furnace, and loaded as it was with a fine irritating dust, the torture, especially to the sick and wounded, was indescribable.

At night every one who was at all capable of moving had to turn out into the trenches. Here they were divided into watches, and did their best to sleep when they were relieved. It

seems almost incredible that amid the incessant rattle and thunder of musket and cannon, they could do so, but their fatigue and exhaustion were so great that they no sooner laid down on their hard beds than slumber mercifully came to their rescue. In many instances that slumber was their last, for throughout the night the rebels kept up the bombardment, and the shells continually found their victims.

The morning of June 21 was destined to usher in a most terrible day. The suspicion got abroad that a fierce attack was contemplated, and this suspicion was soon fully confirmed. Shortly after daybreak a vast mob was seen approaching the entrenchment from all sides. They were sepoys from various regiments, dressed in odds and ends of uniforms. A number of Oudh soldiery, once in the service of the deposed King Wazid Ali, ragged ruffians all of them, had joined the rebel forces, and at the lowest computation the enemy was not less than six thousand strong. Among other odd scraps of information, obtained through spies, was one that the leader of this fresh attack, a newly created soubadhar-major, had sworn upon the "Ganga Jal" (Ganges water) either to take the entrenchment or die.

The assault commenced with the enemy's batteries opening simultaneously a tremendous iron storm from all quarters. The attack was the only one where the rebels had a recognised commander—the soubadhar-major, already mentioned, a man of more than ordinary stature, and of enormous strength. The day is also noteworthy in another respect; the natives

went back to primitive modes of battle. Throwing large bales of cotton before them, they lay behind, and endeavoured to advance under cover, about a hundred sepoy's succeeding in this way in approaching to within 150 yards of the entrenchment wall. This was intended as a preliminary to the attack, for shortly after the men in the rear of the advance guard, uttering frightful yells, sprang upon the walls, led by the soubadhar-major. The attack was a complete failure. At the very first discharge of our musketry the soubadhar fell dead, and the rest went no farther.

Shortly after the rout a most daring deed was done by gallant Lieutenant Delafosse. About midday one of the ammunition wagons in the south-east corner was blown up by the enemy's shell, and whilst it was blazing the rebel batteries opened fire upon it. The men were frightfully exhausted with the morning's work, and with almost every artilleryman either killed or wounded, assistance was not at hand, and the fire was endangering the other wagons. Delafosse never hesitated a moment. Flinging himself under the burning wagon, he pulled away from it whatever loose timber he could get hold of, meanwhile throwing earth on the flames. He was then joined by two soldiers, who had brought with them a couple of buckets of water which was very dexterously thrown about by the lieutenant, and in spite of the cannonading the fire was extinguished, and Delafosse escaped unhurt.

It was on this day, the 21st, that the last letter sent from the doomed stronghold was written

by Major Vibart, and dispatched to Lucknow. He wrote :

"Any aid to be effective must be immediate. In the event of rain falling our position would be untenable. According to telegraphic dispatches received previous to the outbreak, 1,000 Europeans were to have been here on the 14th. This force may be on its way up. Any assistance you can send might co-operate with it. We have lost about a third of our original number. The enemy are strongest in artillery. They move their guns with great difficulty on account of the unbroken hillocks. The infantry are great cowards, and are easily repulsed."

This brief, comprehensive, soldier-like epistle was dated "Sunday night, 12 p.m." It does not breathe of surrender; and we may be sure there was no thought of anything of the kind in the mind of the gallant soldier when he penned this last appeal; but ill fortune dogged the hapless men and women. Surrender had to come.

As already mentioned, it has always been thought that June 23, the centenary of the battle of Plassy, was to have been the date of a simultaneous outbreak, had not the rising been hastened by the precipitation shown at Meerut. However this may be, a renewal of the great preparations which had so signally failed on the 21st was intended to mark the date of the 23rd.

Captain Thomson anticipated something of the kind, and he was not surprised when on the night of the 22nd he and his gallant little band in No. 2 barrack were threatened by a storming party from No. 1. The look out could see the

sepoys gathering to this position from all parts, and fearing his men would be overpowered by numbers, Thomson sent Dick Heron to Captain Moore for more men.

"Not one can be spared," was the answer, not unexpected. Shortly afterwards, however, Moore came across with Delafosse.

"Thomson," said Moore, "I've a notion of a new dodge. Suppose we go out into the open, and I give the word of command as though we were heading a party of attack? We might give the niggers a scare and do some damage."

The idea was approved, and Moore with a sword, and Delafosse and Heron with muskets, forthwith sallied out.

"Number one to the front!" shouted Moore in his loudest tones, "Number two right about. Steady, my lads, and fire at the word of command!"

The effect was electrical. Hundreds of ammunition pouches rattled on the bayonet sheaths as the frightened foes vaulted from the cover afforded by heaps of rubbish, and rushed helter-skelter into the safe quarters presented by the barrack walls. Thomson's men followed them up with a vigorous salute; and as they did not show fight there was a hearty laugh at the ingenuity which had devised the successful ruse, and the courage with which it had been executed.

Moore was always full of daring. Soon after the burning of the thatched barrack a party, headed by this brave fellow, went out at midnight towards the church compound, where they spiked two or three guns. Then they crept away to

the mess-house, killed several of the native gunners, whom they found asleep at their posts, blew up one of the 24-pounders, and spiked another. The pity of it was that this dashing exploit availed the besieged but little, for the next day fresh guns were brought into position, while of Moore's party engaged in the spiking enterprise one private was killed and four wounded.

All through the night of the 22nd came a series of attacks which were not meant to lead to anything beyond keeping the defenders in a constant state of suspense, and not a man left his post for a second. Toward dawn, when there was a little cessation, Mainwaring, a cavalry cadet, and one of Captain Thomson's pickets, volunteered to keep a sharp look-out with Dick Heron, while their commander took a little rest. Thomson was only too glad of the off, but had scarcely closed his eyes before Mainwaring shouted :

" Here they come ! "

The assailants advanced close up to the doorway of No. 2 barrack, which had no door, but was protected by a line of brickwork about breast high. Never had the enemy shown so much pluck. No doubt they relied upon the besieged being utterly exhausted. They were soon undeceived. Mainwaring's revolver dispatched two or three ; Dick was equally lucky ; Stirling, with his unerring Enfield, shot one and bayoneted another, and Thomson emptied his double-barrelled gun, and not in vain. The men inside the barrack numbered seventeen, and the

enemy left eighteen corpses outside when they retreated.

While the barrack was being attacked a determined onslaught was made upon the entrenchment. The sepoys swarmed like flies. They surrounded the wall on all sides, and in every style of uniform, together with horse and bullock batteries of field artillery sent out as skirmishers. Their attack was ruined by their ignorance. They did not know what to do with their forces. Their cavalry started at once for the charge, but whether through their impetuosity or the incompetence of their leader, the troopers came all the way at a hurried gallop, so that when they reached the entrenchment their horses were winded : a round of artillery threw their ranks into hopeless confusion, and all who did not bite the dust wheeled round and went off helter-skelter.

This day was intended to bring the siege to an end. The men had started with the idea of killing every soul or dying in the attempt. Oaths of solemnity had been taken ; but all their vows came to nought so soon as one of the British batteries lodged a charge in their midst.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, the sting of the attack of the enemy having been thoroughly taken out, the firing of the pickets of the outside barracks abated. Indeed, for two hours the rebels scarcely fired a shot, and the defenders were much puzzled by their inactivity. Dick Heron was for the time being the look-out man in the crow's nest erected by Captain Thomson in No. 2 barrack. Suddenly he shouted :

" There's a woman coming across ! "

One of the pickets thought she was a spy, and would have shot her, but Captain Thomson knocked down his arm and saved her life. The woman had a child at her breast, but was so imperfectly clothed as to be without shoes and stockings. Captain Thomson lifted her over the barricade in a fainting condition, and to his amazement recognised her as Mrs. Greenway, a member of a wealthy family who had resided at Cawnpore.

Mrs. Greenway was the widow of the proprietor of the *Cawnpore Gazette*. The family, on the appearance of the Mutiny, fled to Nuzzulghur, where they had a factory, in the belief that their own villagers would be quite able to protect them from any serious injury. These precautions were, however, utterly useless, as they fell into the Nana's hands. One of the members of this family paid the Nana three lacs of rupees if he would spare the lives of the entire household : the unprincipled monster took the ransom, but murdered all the Greenways, as already related, with the exception of the aged lady who so unexpectedly appeared to Captain Thomson.

The poor woman was in a fainting condition when she arrived, and it was some time before she could speak. When she was able to do so, she handed Captain Thomson a letter with this superscription :

"To the Subjects of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria."

Captain Thomson opened the letter and read the following : "All those who are in no way connected with the acts of Lord Dalhousie, and

are willing to lay down their arms shall receive a safe passage to Allahabad."

He handed the letter to General Wheeler.

"We cannot recognise this," said the old General. "There's no signature attached. The writing is clearly Azimoolah's, but that's not enough. It may be a ruse."

There was ample cause for General Wheeler's suspicions. Only a few days before, great excitement was caused by the arrival in the entrenchment of a native spy, who came in the garb of a bhistee, or water-carrier. This fellow declared himself to be a friend, and said he had brought good news. And good news indeed it would have been had it been true.

"Two companies of European soldiers are on the other side of the river," said he. "They have brought a couple of guns from Lucknow, and they are about to cross the Ganges. Tomorrow you will see them."

A present was made him, and he was sent out to get more particulars. The next day he came again and told General Wheeler that the European soldiers were prevented crossing the stream by the rising of the river, but that they were constructing rafts, and might be looked for in a day or two.

The tidings spread, and lighted some flickering rays of hope, even in the bosoms of the most despairing, although there were not a few who doubted the man's story, for the rainy season, though near at hand, had not commenced, and how could the river rise? Time proved they were right. Days rolled on, and the delusion was

dispelled like the mirage. This pretended friend was in fact one of the Nana's spies, and the tidings he conveyed back of the pitiable condition of the defenders must have caused the eyes of his atrocious employer to gleam with malignant joy.

While Mrs. Greenway was on her mission, the guns of the rebel batteries remained inactive, and in a little time the lady was safely brought from the barracks to General Wheeler's quarters. In spite of her age, her courage was unabated.

"This paper is not signed, Mrs. Greenway," said the General. "How can we act upon it?"

"It was given me by Azimoolah Khan. I will take it back to him and tell him what you say," replied the old lady undauntedly.

"No, no; it is too terrible a risk. The scoundrel, out of mere spite, may kill you."

"I am not afraid of death—I have been too near it so many times," said the brave woman.

"Give me the paper, and let me go."

General Wheeler grasped Mrs. Greenway's hand, and Captain Moore and Captain Whiting escorted her to the entrenchment wall. Here a white flag was hoisted, and the anxious men watched her disappear into the mutineers' camp.

When she was gone, the message from the Nana was the only subject upon which the poor creatures could think or talk. The men, wasted spectres as they were, preferred taking their chance, and, as a last resource, cutting their way through, when the remains of their miserable fortification no longer afforded them any protection. But how could they leave the women and children?

On the other hand, it was certain that, unless help arrived within a couple of days or so, they must, if they remained within the entrenchments, inevitably be slaughtered. There was also another calamity shadowing them—the rainy season. The cooped-up defenders dreaded nothing so much as the setting in of the rain, which was expected daily. In the first place, the holes dug in the trenches for the protection of the women and children would be filled up. In the second place, the barracks, which, though thoroughly riddled, still afforded some shelter, would be in danger of coming down, for the soddened walls would no longer hold together. Then, again, the muskets would be rendered useless, for there were a great many of them, and the men were quite unable to clean them all. Lastly, there was the mud wall itself. A few tropical showers would wash it away.

While Mrs. Greenway was gone, General Wheeler consulted with his officers how to act. He was reluctant to surrender, and so were the younger officers, but Captain Moore took a different view. No one could question Captain Moore's courage, much less his fortitude, and what he said undoubtedly had great weight. Besides, he was the very life and breath of the beleaguered band, and had sustained them many a time when they were tempted to despair.

"Think of the women," said he, his voice vibrating with emotion. "Are they not almost maddened by suffering? At least half of our fighting force are gone. Of our fifty-nine artillery men, not six remain. What hope is there for us?"

The argument was irresistible.

"Very well," said Sir Hugh slowly, after a pause. "What must be, must. If Mrs. Greenway returns with a properly signed message, we will treat with the Nana."

In the evening Mrs. Greenway returned with another letter, and this was taken to the General.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed, knitting his white brows. "The Nana requires us to evacuate the entrenchments to-night."

An answer was returned to the effect that the departure must be delayed until the morrow, upon which came back a peremptory message, that the Nana had made up his mind, and that if there were any hesitation on the part of Sir Hugh Wheeler he would open fire once more. He added that he was fully acquainted with the impoverishment of the garrison, and that he knew their guns were shattered. Moore refused to be intimidated. He replied that he was not afraid of the sepoys entering the entrenchments, as the latter had always been beaten back, but if they did succeed, there were men ready at the magazine to blow up the defenders and the enemy. This argument convinced the Nana. He agreed to wait until the following morning.

The preliminaries settled, the General, Moore and the other officers, arranged the terms of the treaty. They ran thus: "That the garrison should give up their guns, ammunition, and treasure; should be allowed to carry their muskets and sixty rounds of cartridges with them; that the Nana should provide carriages for the sick, wounded, women, and children, to

the river's bank, where boats should be in readiness to convey all to Allahabad."

The next morning two men were seen coming from the Nana's camp. One of the men was Juwallah Pershawd, brigadier of the Nana's cavalry, and the other was Azimoolah Khan. Juwallah was one of the Nana's retinue, and was Azimoolah's confidential ally. When they reached a distance of about 200 yards from Captain Thomson's barracks, they made signs, and Captain Moore went to meet them, and brought them into the barracks. They were followed by some of the Mussulman troopers of the 32nd Light Cavalry.

"Shall we talk in English, Captain Moore?" asked Azimoolah Khan, in silky tones.

"As you please," returned Moore, coldly.

At this the troopers began to murmur. They did not understand English, so they said. Accordingly, the negotiations were conducted in Hindustani, and Azimoolah finally departed with the treaty. The same afternoon the document came back unsigned, accompanied by the verbal message that the Nana agreed to the terms. Sir Hugh Wheeler, however, insisted upon the Nana's signature being affixed, and Mr. Todd, a civilian, volunteered to take the document to the Secundah Kothi, the Nana's headquarters. In half an hour he came back, reporting that he had been courteously received, and that the Nana had signed the treaty without hesitation.

Then the preparations for the evacuation began, and the poor creatures who had suffered

such tortures, both mental and bodily, felt that at last the black pall which had enshrouded them for so long was about to be lifted. They were allowed to walk freely out of the entrenchments; and that evening, and before sunset, the shattered guns which had worked such fearful havoc among the rebels were handed over to the Nana, and a company of native artillery stood over them the whole night—men who had been in the service of the Company, and who had been drilled at these very guns.

A committee of three was appointed to go down to the ghaut to see if the boats were in readiness, and all the necessary preparations made, and in their exchange three native officials were sent as hostages. Among them was Juwallah Pershawd. He was taken to Sir Hugh Wheeler, and in a smooth voice began to express his sympathy at seeing him, at his time of life, and a general officer, too, in such a sad condition.

"You need not trouble yourself concerning me," said the General curtly.

Sir Hugh was sitting in the shadow of the barracks. His daughters and his wife and Ruth were with him. It went to his heart to see the native artillery men standing guard over the guns which had done such good service; but the brave old man scorned to betray his feelings before the Nana's envoys. His face was like flint. The obsequious Oriental bowed deferentially, and without noticing the rebuff, went on to say that he should take special care no harm came to him.

"Or to the mem-sahibs either," he added,

his dark, treacherous eyes resting for a moment on the women.

Finding Sir Hugh indisposed to talk, the man rose after a while, and as he passed Ruth stopped for a moment, and looked fixedly at her.

"You are Miss Ruth Armitage?" said he suddenly, and in perfect English.

"And what then?" answered the girl.

"You, at least, have nothing to fear," said he, dropping his voice to a whisper. "That is Azimoolah's message of peace to you."

"Azimoolah is nothing to me," retorted Ruth, her pallid face a little flushed.

"Aha!" smiled the man, "we will see!"

The terrible scenes Ruth had gone through, the absence of rest, the want of food, and continual strain on the nerves, had not weakened the girl's spirit. Flashing a look of scorn at the obsequious Juwallah, she left him and went in search of Colonel Waring, who had that morning been stricken down by a slight attack of sun-stroke, and had been taken to the apology for a hospital. Now that the firing had ceased, the remains of the thatched barrack could be utilised, and here the old man had been conveyed.

For the first time for three weeks Ruth was able to cross from one barrack to the other without the risk of being shot. Round the well, to reach which so many men had sacrificed life and limb, was clustered a thirsty group. Never did nectar taste so delicious as those draughts of water, cloudy though it was with the bricks and mortar disturbed by shot and shell and precipitated into the spring. The poor people never

seemed able to drink their fill, and down went the buckets times out of number that day.

As Ruth reached the shattered verandah she met one of the surgeons coming out of the door-way.

"How is Colonel Waring, Dr. Sargeant?" she inquired anxiously.

The surgeon took her hand in his, and looked kindly and pityingly in her eyes.

"Colonel Waring is more fortunate than the rest of us. He is at peace, Miss Armitage."

"Dead?" she cried.

The surgeon bowed his head.

"I don't think we should mourn his fate," said he gently.

"No, no," she repeated hurriedly. "No one here can wish for life, and yet we struggle for it."

She tried to speak calmly, but the effort was beyond her strength. She leant against the support of the verandah, and covering her face with her hands, wept bitterly. The surgeon gazed at her with tender sympathy in his grave eyes, and moved softly away. What could he do to cheer or comfort her?

But it was not so much grief at the death of the brave old colonel which so oppressed her. He was past all human suffering now, and was really to be envied. It was the horrible sense of being utterly desolate and forlorn which filled her with dark despair. What was to be her own fate? *Tha'* was the terrible problem ever before her eyes.

CHAPTER XIX

A SAD EXODUS

It was now June 26, and the following day was appointed for the departure. The firing had ceased on June 24, and it was wonderful to see what a change had already taken place in the look of the poor creatures. Worn and emaciated and weak they were still, but they had been able to wash—the first time since the guns of Nana Sahib opened fire on the 6th of June. Some had managed to secure a change of clothes, but most of them wore their old tattered garments. As for food, there was no variation save a double ration of chupatties and dhal. Captain Moore disdained to ask the enemy for assistance in this direction, and none was proffered.

Ruth met the daughters of General Wheeler just outside the barracks. The two girls were greatly attached to each other, and their devotion to their father and mother throughout the siege never slackened. The prospect of a speedy release had put them in good spirits.

"We ought to be at Allahabad within a week!" exclaimed the eldest. "It will be terribly hot on the river, but I shall not mind that in the joy of getting free from this dreadful place!"

"Aren't you glad, Ruth?" said her sister.

"Yes, indeed. If only poor Colonel Waring had lived——"

"Ah, he is gone then!" said the girl gently, but in no way surprised. They were so used to hear of deaths.

"Yes," answered Ruth in a dull, stunned way.

"I am so sorry for you, dear. You will keep with us, won't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"We leave here to-morrow. You know that, Ruth, of course. The committee went down to the river this morning, and we expect them back before sunset," said Miss Wheeler.

Captain Athill Turner and Lieutenants Delafosse and Good were the committee appointed to inspect the arrangements made by the Nana for the reception of the British. They proceeded to the ghauts attended by an escort of native cavalry, and examined the boats. Forty craft were moored off the bank, and the committee saw nothing to excite their suspicions.

Some of these boats were open, and others were roofed, some with wood and others with thatch. Those which were open were in course of being roofed—a very important matter, as to travel under the rays of the fierce sun would simply mean death to the men and women already exhausted by fatigue and starvation. They were about thirty feet long and twelve broad, and were ordinary up-country craft. On board some of the boats provisions were being conveyed, and the coolies were apparently working with zeal. How could the committee tell

that when their backs were turned all these stores would be taken ashore again?

The officers finished their inspection and prepared to return to the entrenchment. The banks were lined with sepoy, mostly belonging to the 50th Native Infantry, and the three Englishmen could not help noticing the sinister expression on the faces of many.

"Did you hear that?" suddenly asked Captain Turner of Lieutenant Good.

"Hear what?"

"What that man said. I am sure the word was *kutile*" (massacre).

Good listened, but without appearing to do so. He, too, heard the ominous word spread like a low hiss from man to man.

"You're quite right," returned Good. "I don't like it. We must keep a sharp look-out, though what we can do now Heaven alone knows!"

The committee reported to Sir Hugh Wheeler and Captain Moore the result of their visit, and also mentioned what they had heard. To neither the General nor to his second in command did it convey anything sinister. The men might have been talking about some other massacre.

"I hope it is so," said Captain Turner, "but I have my doubts."

"Whether or not," said Sir Hugh Wheeler, "we can only depend on our muskets. Our guns are gone."

The poor General sighed, and no wonder. To surrender artillery is the bitterest sacrifice a General can make. Yet what else could he do?

Meanwhile the rebels had been greatly concerned at the delay in the departure of the garrison. They said :

"Now that the Europeans have washed and dressed, and have had time to rest, they will not go away at all. They have held out so long now they will be able to hold out longer."

But the cause of the delay was not the fault of the English, who were only too anxious to take their departure. No one knew, no one suspected, that Bala Rao, Nana Sahib's brother, and Azimoolah Khan were then deliberating over an act of fiendish treachery and that they required time to mature their plans. Even the sepoys were not aware of this, and it was to satisfy them that the guns and the treasure were taken away on the morning of the 26th.

The three officers, on leaving General Wheeler, were surrounded by the ladies, anxious to know their opinion as to the state of affairs.

"Do you think it will be all right to-morrow?" asked Mrs. Ewart.

"I have no reason to think otherwise," said Captain Turner, guardedly.

He did not say anything about overhearing the word "kuttle."

"But will they really let us go down to Allahabad in safety?" asked Ruth.

Somehow she had a presentiment that they had not seen the last of their terrible trials.

"I hope so—I really believe so," answered Turner.

And with this the poor things had to be satisfied.

That was the last night they spent in the entrenchment, and they slept soundly—oh, so soundly! The stillness, in contrast to the continual uproar to which they had been subjected, seemed unnatural. The silence was profound, oppressive—ominous.

Yet it did not pass without one interruption. Juwallah Pershawd had caused a strong guard of cavalry and infantry to be placed all round, with the plausible excuse of guarding the place—though, in reality, it was done to prevent the possibility of any one escaping during the night. Suddenly a musket shot from No. 1 barrack awoke the echoes. It was enough for the enemy. They immediately opened fire on the entrenchment. The force within stood perfectly quiet, and never returned a shot. In spite of all they had gone through, their faculties were completely under command. They knew that the least piece of rashness on their part would convert the men outside into savages. Meanwhile, Juwallah went to the barrack, and discovered the cause. A sleepy sepoy had dropped his musket, and it had gone off. Explanations were sent, and after this all was quiet again.

From this time to dawn the only sounds which broke the stillness were the growling of the jackals and the shrieks of the vultures and adjutant birds. Every night these scavengers of the earth had been on the watch, but the noise of the guns kept them at a distance. Now they were permitted to ravage undisturbed.

Early in the morning of Saturday June 27 all was astir. The evacuation was to commence

at six; and though many of the women and children had to be awakened, not one grudged the loss of sleep, though they had to be roused forcibly, so heavy was their slumber.

At sunrise a number of carts, palanquins, dhoolies, and elephants arrived. They had been sent by the Nana for the transport of the women, the sick, and the wounded. The elephant generally used by General Wheeler, with its howdah and driver, was brought and was occupied by Lady Wheeler and her two daughters and Ruth Armitage, while the General, not feeling disposed to look conspicuous, rode on horseback.

Slowly the party filed out between the ranks of sepoys who looked on—with what thoughts, who can tell? Over a thousand souls were shut up within on June 4; not more than 450 came out on the 27th. All the rest had perished.

It was a truly sad spectacle. That noble little band, worn to shadows, had, for twenty long days, in the hottest season of the year, kept at bay a blood-thirsty foe to be numbered by thousands; their sole defence a low wall, barely four feet high, with a shallow ditch, not worthy the name of an entrenchment. They had yielded, not through any submission of their will or weakness of their brave hearts, but out of compassion to the weak and to the helpless, and with the vain hope of shortening suffering.

Slowly and painfully the procession toiled along. Many of the women had brought with them little articles of property, some intrinsically worthless, others of considerable value, but all endeared by memorials of love to the various

owners. Tattered and torn, weak and wounded, they hastened on with eager steps and beating hearts to the cruel fate awaiting them, all unconscious of the base treachery which was being planned by Azimoolah Khan and Bala Rao, with or without the consent of the Nana.

The whole of the rebel army had assembled to see the English depart, and no sooner was the last man out than, with a fiendish yell, they rushed into the entrenchment, swarming in crowd after crowd, till nearly 8,000 men were jostling each other within the mud wall. They were eager for loot, but very little worth taking did they find in the skeleton barracks. In the hurry of departure, and for want of sufficient carriages, some twelve helpless patients were left behind, not with the intention of being abandoned, but to be sent for as soon as the dhoolies could be spared. These hapless creatures were dragged out into the centre of the entrenchment, and after being abused and mocked, were cruelly butchered.

Meanwhile the sepoy outside urged on the fugitives with encouraging cries.

"Come to the boats! All is ready!" they shouted.

The able-bodied men loaded themselves with as much ammunition as they could carry, and walked down indiscriminately after the advance guard. This guard consisted of some men of the 32nd, led by the brave Captain Moore. The women and children were put on the elephants and into bullock carts, while the sick and disabled were conveyed in the dhoolies and palanquins.

Never, surely, was there such an emaciated, ghostly party of human beings.

Soon the waters of the Ganges could be seen gleaming in the distance. The tops of the roofed boats were also visible, and, gladdened by the sight, the poor creatures hastened onwards. Happy, perhaps, were they that the future was a sealed book. Could they have pictured what was to take place within the next few hours, what indescribable mental torture would have been theirs !

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CHAPTER XX

THE MASSACRE OF THE BOATS

THE distance from the entrenchment to the ghaut on the Ganges, where lay the boats which the released garrison expected were to convey them in safety to Allahabad, was about two miles. After much painful labour—for the heat was great, and many were so weak they could scarcely walk—the sad procession reached the wooden bridge over a ravine which at this point runs into the Ganges. Proceeding along the road, they turned aside into another ravine which led to the Suttee Choura Ghaut. Here they found the boats awaiting them; but, alas, with but few exceptions these boats had been hauled into the shallows.

“These boats have been shifted!” exclaimed Captain Turner angrily. “They’re not where they were when we saw them. Does it mean treachery?”

The officer he addressed glanced at the boats and returned no answer. Meanwhile a vast multitude of natives had gathered in order to see the English depart, and the embarkation began, but it progressed with the utmost difficulty. The officers and men standing in the

water helped the wounded and the ladies and children into the boats, and even some of the more friendly disposed natives came down and assisted.

"It is a thousand pities the boats are not in deeper water!" exclaimed Captain Moore. "Yet I cannot think they have been placed here purposely. Look at that trooper. Would he stand here if there was treachery?"

This trooper was a Government camel sowar from Agra, who had brought and safely delivered a dispatch from that station for General Wheeler the previous evening. The man was talking to the elephant driver who had brought Lady Wheeler, and both seemed perfectly unconcerned.

The ill-luck of the garrison continued. While they were in the entrenchments they dreaded the approach of the rains, as the wall would have been washed away. Now they had to mourn the absence of rain, for the Ganges was at its lowest.

"Hurry! hurry!" called out Captain Moore. "It's no use preserving order. Get in how you can. For Heaven's sake, push off quickly, and get to the other side. I will then give you further instructions."

The scene was one of terrible confusion. Dick Heron searched everywhere for Ruth, but in vain. He had once caught sight of her during the painful journey to the river, but he had been ordered with others to form a little rearguard in case of treachery, and speech between them was impossible. At the banks he hoped to ex-

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change a word. A "God bless you" from her dear lips would give him inexpressible comfort. The boat under the charge of Major Vibart was the first one to fill, but among the sad, hollow-eyed, haggard-faced women, whom Dick was assisting into the frail craft, he could not see Ruth.

"Enough," shouted Vibart; "the boat won't take any more."

It was deep in the water; its human freight threatening a new danger owing to the lowness of the river. Dick turned to prevent those behind from crowding in and adding to the risk, and came face to face with the girl for whom he yearned.

"At last!" he whispered eagerly. "I wanted to see you once more. You must go in the next boat. Major Vibart's is full."

She could say nothing. The ghost of a sad smile flitted across her wan face. She was very weak, and she let him take her in his arms and carry her to the second boat.

"You are coming too," Dick heard her murmur.

"Not yet. I want to help the others."

"No, no . . . you *must* come."

He was standing knee deep in the water close to the edge of the boat. He suddenly felt her arms round him. For an instant both forgot everything but themselves. Their lips were pressed in one long, fervent, farewell kiss.

"God bless you, dear—dear Dick," he heard her breathe faintly.

The fulfilment of his wish ! He did not care now if death came. And indeed it was nearer than he imagined.

While their arms were entwined a flag was seen to wave from behind a group of natives on the bank, and the rowers in Vibart's boat jumped out and waded to the shore.

" You rascals ! " shouted the Major.

He whipped out his revolver and promptly fired into the crowd of traitors, and two or three of the soldiers in the boat followed suit. " Those who are able, jump in the water and push the boat off ! " cried Vibart, and instantly all who were not severely wounded sprang over the side. Dick heard the Major's appeal, and gently disengaged himself from Ruth's loving embrace.

" Good-bye, darling, my own love ! " he cried passionately. He rushed away waving something above his head. It was the handkerchief she had given him—his mascotte !

A sob escaped Ruth's lips, but Dick never heard it. Happiness irradiated his wasted face, and he rushed to the boat in front and lent his strength to those already at work.

Scarcely had they moved the boat a foot when a bugle note awoke the echoes, and at the signal a deadly fire was opened upon the defenceless people from an ambush all along the banks. Among those who fell first was brave Dick Heron. God was merciful to him. Shot through the heart, he died a painless death.

The musketry firing was commenced by some

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troopers, and was taken up by the infantry concealed in the ruined buildings near the river, on the heights, and behind stacks of timber. Then succeeded the roar of cannon.

Amidst this frightful scene and hideous din, the proverbial coolness and intrepidity of Englishmen did not fail them. The fire of their foes was at once returned from the fourth boat on the line, and every exertion made to get clear; but most of the boats were unable to move. They simply became easy targets for the cowardly demons, most of whom kept themselves concealed.

The diabolical scheme of Azimoolah was complete indeed!

Unmindful of the Nana's oath and promise, a conference had been held in the Nana's tent between Azimoolah, the Nana's brother, and others, and the wretches decided that the British should be massacred on the banks of the river. Orders were issued accordingly for the destruction of the doomed garrisons.

At an early hour in the morning some five hundred mutineers, with two guns, marched to the Sutte Choura Ghaut, off which the boats were moored. One gun and a party of sepoy were placed in the ruins of a house which, being built on a height, commanded the whole line of boats.

Another party of twenty-five men were secreted in a nullah, or ditch. A third party was drawn up behind some stacks of timber, and lower down the river a number of troopers under the command of Tantia Topee, who subsequently

led the rebels in the field against Havelock, were posted. Still lower down was a second gun and a large band of sepoys, and eight hundred yards below this was a third gun, with its attendant party. Two of the guns commanded the river for some distance, both above and below the little flotilla, and could easily rake the boats as they lay at the Suttee Ghaut, as also any that might succeed in getting away and floating down the stream.

But this was not all. The infernal mind of Azimoolah left nothing unthought of. On the Oudh, or north side of the river (Cawnpore lies on the south of the Ganges) the 17th Native Infantry, the 13th Native Cavalry, and two guns were concealed behind a sandy ridge, the former to intercept any fugitives attempting to escape towards Lucknow, and the latter to fire upon any of the unhappy victims seeking shelter on the outer or river side of the boats. A party of horse and foot were also told off to follow the garrison, and on their reaching the wooden bridge already mentioned as leading to the Suttee Choura Ghaut, to form up there in line as a firing party.

Thus every avenue of escape was guarded with fiendish acuteness, and the doomed band completely hemmed in by their bloodthirsty and cowardly foes.

It is not possible to describe the terror of the poor women when the fierce, murderous fire opened upon them on all sides. The brave, the heroic Moore, the dauntless Lieutenant Ashe, Lieutenant Bolton, who had entered the en-

trenchment by leaping his horse over the mud wall after escaping a hundred deaths, were all killed in attempting to push off Major Vibart's boat. One lady was standing up in the stern soon after the boat was floated, and having been struck by a round shot, fell overboard and sank immediately. Her poor little boy, six years old, came up to Captain Mowbray Thomson with tears in his eyes, and said :

"Mamma has fallen overboard !"

Captain Thomson endeavoured to comfort him, but the poor little fellow cried out :

"Oh, why are they firing upon us ? Did they not promise to leave off ?"

The horrors of the lingering hours of that day seemed as if they would never cease. There was no food on the boats, and scarcely one of the fugitives had eaten before starting. The water of the Ganges was all that passed the lips of that devoted band, save prayers and shrieks and groans. The wounded and the dead were often entangled together at the bottom of the boat.

And yet another horror was at hand. On board Major Vibart's boat it fell to Ruth's lot to be the first to discover it.

"Captain Lawrence ! Captain Lawrence !" she cried in agonised tones, "the roof is burning !"

It was too true. Before jumping overboard the miscreants of boatmen had contrived to conceal burning charcoal in the thatch. The straw was like tinder ; the motion of the boat, slow as it was, had disturbed the hot air sufficiently to

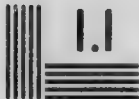


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fan the smouldering thatch into a flame. In a few minutes the fire was crackling fiercely, and thick clouds of suffocating smoke were blinding the poor creatures. Some tried to hurl the burning roof into the river, but the thatch had purposely been made exceedingly thick, and the disturbance only increased the flames.

"Jump into the river!" shouted Lawrence, who was in command, in a despairing voice. "It is our only chance. We can but die."

But, alas! the wounded could not stir. Their cries were agonising, but they were beyond the reach of human aid. Unable to move, they were burnt to death. Mercifully, the volumes of smoke veiled the terrible scene.

Those who had leaped into the water sought shelter from the fierce storm of grape and musketry on the outer or river side of the boats. It was a vain hope. The fiends who had planned the hideous massacre were prepared for this. Guns and infantry were posted on the Oudh side of the river for this contingency, and they opened a murderous fire.

Ruth was among those who were the last to seek refuge in the river. She was a splendid swimmer, and she went half a dozen yards under the water before she came to the surface. So long as she had life she would cling to it, and after taking breath, she once more dived, hoping to reach the bank, which, she thought, would afford her a little shelter. She reached the spot she had marked out, and here she crouched.

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Meanwhile, when the Nana's treachery became apparent, the boat which General Wheeler was about to enter with his family, cut its cable and dropped down the river, followed by two companies of infantry and two guns. The brave old man stood for a moment gazing at the scene of carnage, and while remaining helpless and defenceless, one of the troopers rushed at him and made a cut at him with his sword. His head was severed and fell with the body into the river.

Major Vibart's boat was a little lighter draught than the rest, and got away first, drifting down the stream. Those who had hurled themselves in the water rather than be burnt alive swam after it, but it dared not stop, and but for its grounding the swimmers would never have reached it.

The nearest party of sepoys immediately opened fire with their muskets, and attempted to commence a cannonade. They had two guns, but the larger of these they did not know how to manage, as they could not work the elevating screw, so they loaded the smaller one with grape tied up in bags, and the infantry discharged their muskets. Yet even in that supreme hour the heroic men, worn and defenceless, never lost their courage. They responded with their rifles so effectively that they actually drove off the sepoys.

The boat was terribly crowded, for one of the other boats which got away from the ghaut was struck by a round shot below the watermark, and was rapidly filling when she came alongside

Major Vibart's boat. Many were drowned, but the survivors were taken on board, leaving but little room to work her.

She was soon, indeed, in a pitiable state. Her rudder was shot away, there were no oars, and the only implements which could be brought into use were a spar or two and such pieces of wood as could be safely torn from her sides. Grape and round shot flew about from both banks of the river, and shells burst constantly. But about midday she got out of range of the big guns, and these could no longer be shifted, for the sandy bed of the river bank had disabled the artillery bullocks; but the sepoys were on the pursuit the whole day, firing volleys of musketry incessantly.

Six miles was all that was accomplished during the entire day. At 5 p.m. the boat stranded, and the united efforts of those on board to move her were useless. There was nothing for it but to wait. The sepoys, they knew, were far too cowardly to venture near. But in the morning the enemy would be reinforced, and then the end would come. Everybody in the doomed craft was fully prepared to face death.

The sun had gone down red and angry. The air was insufferably close. The atmosphere above the river was like a vapour bath; a mist hung over the face of the waters. Distant musketry fire could be heard at intervals, with here and there a dropping shot. Their pursuers had fallen away. Whither? Who could say? Possibly to take part in the butchery which it

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was certain awaited those whose boats had not succeeded in getting away.

Just as night was falling the man who was on the look-out called to Major Vibart :

"Look there, sir. What is that? Shall I fire?"

A shadowy figure was crawling along the strip of sand between the water and the bank. So slowly did it move, one could hardly say there was any motion at all.

"Shall I fire, sir?" repeated the man.

"Not yet. It may be one of our own party. Great Heaven, it is a woman!"

He sprang out of the boat, and so did another officer who heard his words. They ran to the dim outline—it was scarcely more. The last ounce of strength was expended, the figure was prostrate. They raised her. A faint sound escaped her pallid lips, so faint it could scarcely be called a groan.

"Do you see who it is?" said Vibart in a compassionate tone. "Poor Ruth Armitage, the pluckiest little woman in the entrenchment, and that is saying a good deal where all were plucky."

"Poor thing! I fear it is all over," said the other.

"It would be cruel to wish otherwise," said Vibart in a low voice. "I'm heartily sick of it. I care not how soon my hour comes."

How many times during that terrible three weeks had not that wish been uttered!

They took her to the boat and laid her down. She seemed to be scarcely conscious, and they

imagined her brain had been wandering. It would not have been extraordinary, for she had undergone a terrible ordeal. Hidden among the tall weeds, she had undergone a thousand risks of being shot, yet not one bullet had touched her. She saw Major Vibart's boat go by, but dared not come from her hiding-place.

She was sufficiently near the landing-place to know what had happened—how all those who were not shot, or burnt, or drowned, were hurried by the brutal soldiery to land. Then some cause, she knew not what, seemed to draw the sepoys, the gunners, and the troopers from their posts. However, it was clear to her that the river was left unguarded, and she moved from her hiding-place and swam down with the current. Her weakness prevented her going very far, and every now and then she had to creep to the bank and rest, always choosing a spot where she could conceal herself.

It was a miracle she reached the boat. But for the fact that it was grounded she would never have succeeded, and must have died of exhaustion. As it was, nothing could be done to restore her strength, for there was neither bite nor sup. And so she remained quietly lying like a poor bruised lily, her life apparently ebbing away.

All through the night incessant efforts were made to get the boat afloat, and at last the fugitives were successful. But they were not let alone by the rebels. The latter took to shooting arrows with live coal fastened to them, to ignite, if possible, the thatched roof, and this

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fiendish device might have been successful, had not the officers and soldiers pulled the roofing to pieces and thrown it overboard.

Thus, when the boat again started it was without any protection from the scorching sun and the bullets of the sepoys.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST STAND

WHEN morning broke not a sign of pursuit was to be seen, and the poor souls began to indulge in hopes that their merciless enemies had given up the chase. Yet the boat was but a short distance from Cawnpore; for, owing to the absence of proper oars, they had during the whole of the night gone only four miles.

Ruth was lying in a semi-conscious state at the bottom of the boat, with wet rags over her forehead. She was still terribly exhausted, but had revived a little with resting. If only food could be procured, she might yet recover strength.

"Our sole chance of getting something to eat is from a friendly native," said Major Vibart, "but some of you fellows will have to forage. I'm helpless," said he, with a melancholy smile.

The gallant officer had been shot through both arms, and indeed there was not one of the men who had not been terribly wounded. Captain Athill Turner had both his legs smashed; Lieutenant Quin was shot through the arm, Captain Seppings through the arm, Lieutenant Harrison was shot dead. With so many disabled—for, of course, the privates and non-coms. were in the

same condition—the boat went along at a snail's pace, and even then it was only with the greatest care she was prevented from grounding. About eight a.m. one of the soldiers called out that he could see some natives bathing a little distance ahead.

Upon this Captain Thomson spoke to a native drummer who was in the boat, and persuaded him to go and talk with them, and induce them to get some food. The drummer took with him five rupees, and came back with the welcome news that one of the bathers had promised to obtain some food, and also, if possible, the help of some native boatmen. The man left his lotah, or cooking-pot, as a guarantee of fidelity, but never returned, and so the hope which had been kindled died away.

This man also gave the drummer some unpleasant information. Orders, so he said, had been sent to Nuzzuffhur, two miles farther, to seize the boat, and that a powerful zemindar, or farmer, on the Oudh side had undertaken to see that not one of the occupants of the boat should leave his territory.

"It's all up!" exclaimed Captain Whiting despairingly. "Pass me that bottle."

"What are you going to do?" said a brother officer. The bottle was an empty one, and for the moment he thought Whiting had taken leave of his senses.

"I want to write our last dying speeches and confessions," said Whiting, with a gloomy attempt at a jest.

Somebody had a scrap of lead pencil, and

somebody else had a scrap of paper, and Captain Whiting wrote a brief statement of the position of affairs, and how all hope had been abandoned. Then he added as many names of those who were alive as he could cram into the paper: the bottle was closed up and cast into the river, there to take its chance. What became of it was never known.

Half an hour afterwards some fellows appeared on the bank dragging a small gun. Just as it was pointed the rain poured down in torrents. It was fired only once, and then the men went away. There was no further molestation until sunset, when a hideous shouting and yelling told of the presence of pursuers. About fifty or sixty sepoys were in a boat, which was being rowed by a dozen native rowers. They had come from Cawnpore with orders to destroy the fugitives. So exultant were they at the prospect of murder, that they stood up in the boat, loading the English with abuse, and the rowers, turning round to look at the boat in advance, ran their own craft on to a sandbank. There it stuck.

"Boys," cried Vibart, "we'll die fighting. Let us go for them."

In spite of their exhaustion, all the gallant fellows who could move jumped overboard, and rushing through the shallow water, threw themselves on the grounded boat. In spite of their superiority in numbers and in strength, these poys made but a feeble resistance, and when the victorious little band returned, each had killed his man, and more. There was a quantity of

ammunition in the boat, and this Vibart appropriated. But, alas! there was no food, and when the poor women asked eagerly if anything to eat had been found, they could only be answered by a mournful shake of the head.

That evening was a terrible one. Again was the boat fast set on a sandbank, and it seemed as if, indeed, the end of their journey had come. Overcome with faintness and weariness, the poor creatures sank down and allowed slumber to seize them, wishing they might never wake again. They were so indifferent and despondent that they did not even post sentries. About midnight came on a terrific hurricane, and two or three of the lightest sleepers were aroused.

"God be thanked!" exclaimed one, "we're rocking! We must be afloat again."

And so indeed it proved. But though hopes began to rise, they were dashed when daylight broke.

"Ill-luck pursues us to the bitter end!" cried Vibart. "Do you see where we are, Sinclair?"

"I do indeed," replied the man addressed. "We've drifted out of the navigable channel, and I doubt if we shall ever get back. There, did you hear that?"

A significant grating sound at the bottom of the boat told what had happened. The boat was again stranded, and this time it was not only immovable, but had no chance of being moved, for it was in a small tributary of the Ganges, where the water was low and the current slug-

gish. Men and women looked at each other in mute despair. What could they do but wait for death?

"And death will come quickly enough," muttered Vibart savagely between his teeth. "I can see a party of the devils over yonder. It won't be long before we are discovered."

He was quite right. With a fierce yell of triumph a score of sepoys, the advance-guard of others, opened fire upon the unprotected boat remaining on the bank, a fixed, immovable target which could not well be missed. But to sit quietly and be shot at is not the way with Britons.

"Thomson," exclaimed Major Vibart, "take Delafosse, Sergeant Grady, and as many as you can get together, and do your best to drive off the scoundrels. It's our only chance. We smashed up the others, and we may do the same with these. While you're gone we'll try and get the boat afloat."

Every one seemed to realise that now the last moment had really come. Some of the women shed tears silently; others, with dry eyes, sat staring, vaguely, into space, their faculties dazed and paralysed. In spite of the absence of food, Ruth had gained a little strength. As for her courage it was indomitable.

"Can we not help you, Major Vibart?" she asked.

"What can you do? We can hardly help ourselves, my dear," said the Major bluntly.

Thomson and Delafosse had gone off on their plucky expedition, and Vibart and a dozen or so

more were in the water nearly up to their waists preparing for an effort to move the boat.

"If we cannot fight, we can use our arms in other ways. Let us," she went on, turning towards the women, "get out of the boat and assist Major Vibart."

There was something inspiring in Ruth's voice. It seemed to breathe of steadfastness and hope. It roused the others, and, encouraged by her example, they jumped into the water, and added their efforts, feeble as they were, to those of the men.

Meanwhile Captain Thomson and his comrades, maddened by desperation, charged the crowd of sepoys and drove them back some distance, until they were thoroughly surrounded by a mingled party of natives, armed and unarmed. Cutting and slashing, they forced their way through their foes, received more wounds, but without the loss of a man. The sepoys fled, and the brave fellows turned their faces once more to the boat. Again they were surrounded, and again they fought their way through to the spot where they had landed, only to find the boat gone.

At first they thought it had been moved, and was farther down the stream, and so they ran by the side of the river some little way. But there was no sign of any boat or any indication of any conflict, and there was nothing left but to do the best they could for themselves. So they turned from the river, and never did they set eyes on the boat or its occupants again.

What had happened was this: Captain Mow-

bray Thomson and his men had not been gone more than ten minutes before a couple of boats were seen coming up from the Ganges into the side-stream, where they were stranded.

"Into the boat, all of you!" called out Vibart.

The poor creatures scrambled back just as a fierce musketry fire was opened. Vibart was killed on the spot, and half a dozen others mortally wounded. One or two tried to fire their muskets, but the torrents of rain had ruined their ammunition. Resistance was useless. The sepoys saw this, and came on with a rush. Surrounded as the little band was, and half dead with fatigue, there was nothing left but surrender. Then the firing ceased. The prisoners were transferred to two other boats, and the one they left was broken up. The pieces floated down the stream into the Ganges, and this is why when Mowbray Thomson returned he could see no sign of the boat.

The fugitives received no ill-usage from their captors, but this was because the latter were anxious to make a good show before the Nana, to whom the poor prisoners were to be delivered, and about a mile from Cawnpore they were landed and placed in carts. It was then July 3. When they arrived at Cawnpore the men were separated from the women, and ordered to be shot. Among the doomed men was Captain Seppings, of the 2nd Cavalry, and a few of his troopers begged as a special favour that his life might be spared.

"No, no," said the others; "he must be killed."

They were Mahomedans who said this, and as they uttered these words a crowd collected round Captain Seppings and commenced repeating a Persian verse, the meaning of which was :

"To extinguish the fire and leave the spark, to kill a snake and preserve its young, is not the wisdom of men of sense."

It was the custom of the Mahomedans when a request was made to spare a male child—and many of the natives were desirous of getting some European child to adopt—to gather round and chant in a monotone the verse of which the above is a translation. Sometimes they carried their beliefs further. It often happened whenever a Mahomedan found the *lifeless* body of a European or Christian lying anywhere, he immediately drew out his sword with a "bis-millah," and made a gash in the corpse. This act was considered by them to be equivalent to killing an infidel, and added to their claim for entering Paradise after death.

Not one man received mercy that day. The victims knelt down in prayer—the last prayer their mouths would ever utter—and a volley of musketry opened upon them. Several were killed at once ; those who were not dead were dispatched by the sword.

The poor women sat awaiting their fate, but their time had not yet come. They were ordered to march in the direction taken by their guard, and first their destination was the Servada House, near the place of the massacre. Afterwards they were taken to a small, flat-roofed house, whither the miserable women who had been

excepted from the massacre of the boats on June 27 had preceded them. The meeting was a terribly sad one. The poor creatures compared notes, and sad indeed were their stories.

When Ruth saw the wretched hole into which her companions were thrust she shrank back appalled. It was simply an outbuilding divided by a small compound from the bungalow to which it belonged. This outbuilding stands out in the history of the Mutiny as does no other place. It cannot be thought of without a shudder.

It comprised two principal rooms, each about twenty feet long, and ten broad, with four dark closets, rather than rooms, at the corners. These four little prisons were but ten feet long by eight feet wide. They were all very low pitched; the roof was flat, and the doors and windows were all secured by strong wooden bars.

Attached to this building was a brick well, about the distance of forty or fifty feet towards the east, around which grew a number of large, shady trees. Mercifully, the poor creatures did not suspect the use to which this well was afterwards put.

Here in this suffocating place, without even the relief of a punkah, the women were cooped up, and after they had been imprisoned some hours the door opened, and they saw standing on the threshold a native woman, whose eyes were glaring maliciously into the darkness of the interior.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIENDISH WOMAN

THERE were some among the poor prisoners who knew this woman with the hard, glittering eyes and the hair streaked with grey.

"The begum—Hooseinee Khanum," they whispered.

The woman's glance went rapidly over the faces of the huddled crowd.

"Where is the *baba logue* (girl of the master race), Ruth Armitage?" said she.

Ruth heard the question. The sight of one of her own sex among the enemies gave her courage. Surely woman would be merciful to woman. She boldly showed herself.

"Ruth Armitage is my name. What is it you want?"

Hooseinee Khanum made no reply, but stared at her insolently for some little time.

"You are lucky, *baba logue*," at last she said in sneering tones.

"What do you mean?" cried Ruth, her heart failing, for the glance the begum bestowed upon her was anything but friendly.

"You will see."

And without another word she glided away,

and was seen no more for some days. When she next appeared it was to order every woman to come out into the enclosure. Though this order might be the prelude to some dreadful deed the poor creatures gladly obeyed. It was a boon to breathe pure air and see the bright sunshine. Adjoining the compound which surrounded their prison was a house called the Old Cawnpore Hotel, and seats were placed for the captives opposite the hotel, and here they were told to sit down. They obeyed, wondering what this act of politeness meant.

The veranda of the hotel was empty, but soon after they had seated themselves, a stout, ungainly man with a vacuous expression on his round fat face waddled from the door leading into the house. He was richly dressed, and was accompanied by a bearded man with keen, piercing eyes. Ruth trembled when she saw these men, for the first was Nana Sahib, and the second Azimoolah Khan.

Nothing happened. The two simply sat and stared, now and then exchanging a word. There were many ladies among the prisoners to whom both men three short months before had paid obeisance, and despite the changes which privation and pain and misery had effected, these ladies must have been recognised, but their captors made no sign.

This ordeal was the precursor of others, and for several evenings the prisoners were allowed to promenade outside the building, and the Nana and his brothers sat and glared at them from the veranda of the hotel. All were surprised

when he ordered a little milk to be given to the children ; and on one occasion meat, cooked by men hired for the purpose, was sent in. But this concession was not repeated, and their meals generally consisted of a small quantity of dhal and chupatties. Clean clothes were also issued, and for this boon the captive women were deeply grateful.

Every day after the first "parade," Hooseinee Khanum visited the compound and spoke to one, and then to another, insinuating that it all depended upon themselves whether their lives would be spared.

One morning, after the poor creatures had been shut up about a fortnight, she came in and went from group to group, scanning them with her bright, serpent-like eyes. At last she stopped in front of Ruth.

"Baba logue," said she, "why do you stay here when you might be free and live in a beautiful house, and have lovely jewels, diamonds, and rubies ?"

"What do you mean ?" said Ruth.

The woman laughed.

"Do you not understand ? You are fair in the eyes of Azimoolah Khan. Away from this place, and with servants to dress your hair and to wait upon you hand and foot, you would be more handsome than you are now. Azimoolah would save your life. You have but to say 'Yes.'"

Ruth's eyes flashed, and her pale cheeks reddened with indignation.

"Tell Azimoolah Khan that I've always

despised him, and that I despise him more than ever!" she cried.

"You are a fool!" answered the woman composedly. "Do you not know that the English will be killed—yes, all of them? The Nana's soldiers are now on their way to meet the English troops. Not one will escape. Ah, you are brave, you English women, but you are foolish," said Hooseinee Khanum, with a sneer, and walked away.

For the next three days permission was not given for the captives to promenade as usual. The heat of the flat-roofed house, crowded as it was, became insufferable, and the poor things endured intolerable torture. About noon on July 15 they heard in the distance the clanging of native instruments and the beating of drums—the procession of the Nana at the head of his men, who were going out to meet Havelock, for news had arrived not only that the latter had beaten the rebels twice, but that he was rapidly advancing towards Cawnpore.

The tidings of the second defeat struck terror into the camp at Cawnpore—the more so as Bala Rao, the Nana's brother, had been severely wounded in the shoulder. Every fresh intelligence they received from the seat of war was discouraging—every manœuvre proved futile. The British were now within twenty miles of Cawnpore, and there was no resisting them.

Early on the morning of the 15th a few troopers, their horses covered with foam, galloped in.

"The English," they said to the Nana, "are coming like mad horses and mad dogs. They

care neither for cannon nor musketry. It is the women and children here that are making them rush on. Kill the maime! (women). Kill the baba logues! (girls). Tell the English what you have done and you will find they will be discouraged, and go back, for they are but a handful in number."

The Nana was not taken with this proposition, but it was different with Azimoolah. For personal reasons he had a spite against the English women, and he resolved to gratify it. So he warmly approved the idea of the massacre, and persuaded the Nana that the troopers were right in believing the British force were advancing simply for the sake of rescuing the women, and that if these were killed the expedition would be abandoned, as was really the case at Jhansi.

A hurried conference was held by the Nana and his friends, including a large number of persons who by loans of money and otherwise, had committed themselves to the rebel cause, which they intended to desert. These persons were well aware that ultimately the English would gain the upper hand, and, thinking only of their own safety, considered it would be well if all chance of evidence of their connection with the previous massacres were destroyed.

And so the bloody work was determined upon. The Nana troubled himself no further, but with all pomp and ceremony went out at the head of a strong force to witness, as he expected, the total rout of the British. Azimoolah Khan was left behind to arrange the details of the butchery.

Within a few hours of the Nana's departure, Hooseinee Khanum made her appearance.

"Mem-sahibs," she cried in her guttural tones, "you have but a few hours to live. The Nana has ordered you to be killed."

A thrill of horror ran through the emaciated frames of the poor victims. Huddled together as they were, they crept yet closer, as though for mutual protection. One woman among the number refused to be terrorised. It was Ruth Armitage.

"I do not believe it!" she cried, in clear, resolute tones. "You are lying, Hooseinee Khanum. Yousouf Khan," she continued, turning to the jemidar of the guard, "you and your men would not do such a wicked thing, I am sure."

"No," said the jemidar, "we will not hurt the *maim* and the *baba logues*."

"Do you say that, Yousouf Khan?" said the begum, her lips parting with the fiendish sneer which curled them. "We will see."

She said no more, but hastily left the bungalow, a low wail of terror from the poor doomed women pursuing her.

No sooner had Hooseinee Khanum left than the jemidar followed her. He was not absent more than five minutes, and when he came back he went straight to where Ruth was standing leaning against the wall, her face averted.

"Misse," said the jemidar, "the Nana would see you. If you went to him, you might do some good."

Ruth wavered. It was the only chance. She

might induce him to be merciful. Who could tell? She did not know that the Nana had gone from Cawnpore, and had left the begum with supreme power.

"Yes," she replied, "I will go."

"No, no!" cried half a dozen women imploringly, "do not leave us. He means you harm."

"He cannot hurt me," said Ruth in a low, firm voice. "I can protect myself. Heaven will give me courage. It is no sin to die by one's own hand."

As she spoke she pressed the bosom of her dress. Here she had concealed a small dagger.

"Yousouf Khan, you were in my father's regiment. He treated you kindly. For his sake you would not deceive me."

"I swear by Allah I will not."

"Dear friends," cried the poor girl, her large, sympathetic eyes seeming to take in all the imploring glances which were turned towards her, "do not despair. There is yet hope." And she followed the jemidar.

She did not return. Soon the poor anxious souls within heard gruff voices outside mingled with the shrill tones of Hooseinee Khanum. The infamous woman was urging the soldiers to enter the house and begin the work of slaughter. The cavalry refused. Bloodthirsty as some had shown themselves to be, they would not do this. Neither would the infantry. Then the woman ran back to Azimoolah Khan for instructions. A message was sent to the sepoy on guard that if they refused they would be blown to

pieces by artillery. Upon this the soldiers reluctantly entered the house, fired once wildly at the ceiling and rushed out.

"We will have nothing to do with such devilish work!" they cried.

Once more Hooseinee Khanum went away and returned with five men, of whom two were butchers and two were villagers. They were brutal, bestial-looking creatures. One of the butchers was a tall, stout, dark man, much pock-marked, with a small beard; the fifth fellow was short and stout, with great hairy hands.

A native drummer who was standing fifteen paces off saw the murderers enter the house at six o'clock. It was then sunset. He could see the lady standing nearest the doorway cut down; then the murderers disappeared inside.

A man ran from the place of slaughter panting, his eyes swollen, his face demoniacal. In one big hairy hand he held a sword, its blade broken in half. He went to the Cawnpore Hotel and returned with another. Once more the same man appeared. The second sword had broken. He fetched a third.

Night closed in; the murderers came out. The door was fastened after them. All was over—save the horror, to come the next day—the horror of the well. On that crowning scene of the unspeakable tragedy let the curtain swiftly fall.

CHAPTER XXIII

TOO LATE ! TOO LATE !

HAVELOCK—the man of the hour—arrived at Benares on June 27, the day on which the horror of the House of Massacre was perpetrated. By the dawn of the 30th he and his men reached Allahabad, and their eager eyes rested on the fort towering above the majestic stream at its base, the confluence of the Ganges, yellow-brown and turbid, with the Jumna, clear, blue, and sparkling.

Philip Heron had been introduced to the General as a Balaclava man, and he heartily received. Heron was strangely impressed by the slender, well-knit figure, the grave, pale face, the firm, resolute mouth, the earnest eyes surmounted by strongly marked brows. The absence of beard and moustache brought into prominence deep lines telling of a strong will, and of habitual self-command.

A hearty cheer went up as the little force passed through the Allahabad gate. The Madras Fusiliers and the men of the 78th and 64th, who had gone on first, Captain Maude's gunners, and Brasyer's Sikhs, joined in one joyous outburst, and Neill, tanned and worn, grasped Havelock by the hand.

"I've done my best, General," Heron heard him say. "You have arrived in time to wish God-speed to Renaud. He sets out this afternoon with an advance column for Cawnpore."

Philip could not catch Havelock's reply, but he could see by the General's face it was congratulatory. The news that an advance column was about to start set Phil Heron on fire. Why could he not be attached to this column? Neill was then taking Havelock to his quarters, where breakfast was awaiting them. There was no time to be lost. Heron hurried after the two leaders and made his request.

"A day or two's rest would be better for you," said Havelock curtly.

"I don't want any rest, sir," he replied impulsively. "Resting means wearing my heart out. I shall never rest until I reach Cawnpore."

"And maybe not then," said Neill, with a grim smile.

"Why are you more impatient than the rest of us to get to Cawnpore?" asked Havelock, bending his keen eyes upon him.

"My brother is there, and—and some one else."

Phil Heron's voice must have betrayed his feelings. Havelock paused, still with his eyes resting on Captain Heron, and then said:

"A woman?"

Yes, sir. The woman I love," said Heron frankly.

The General's face saddened. His eldest son was with him on his staff, but his wife and the rest of his children were in England. Probably

Phil's words had sent his mind flying homeward.

Your wife, sir? " he asked.

"No, sir," said Heron, imitating Havelock's brevity.

The General made no reply—perhaps he understood—but turning to Neill said:

"What force are you sending with Renaud?"

"Four hundred Madras Fusiliers, and 84th, three hundred Sikhs, a handful of troopers, and a couple of nine-pounders."

"Who is in command of the troopers?"

"Captain Harley."

"Let Captain Heron accompany him. Renaud will want all the horsemen he can get. What about a mount?"

"I will manage that, sir," Heron put in boldly.

Havelock gave him a nod of approval. He liked men who were anxious to help themselves. Heron took the nod as setting a seal on his instructions, and hastened away. In half an hour he secured the horse, and rode to the cantonments, where the expeditionary force were getting in readiness for departure. At four the bugle sounded. Havelock gave the departing force a few cheering words. Philip set his horse to a canter, and the next minute was by the side of Harley, who was riding at the head of his company of Oudh cavalry.

The force could only travel at a slow pace. The guns were drawn by bullocks, and these leisurely animals sometimes lagged behind. It was of the highest importance to keep in touch

with the artillery, and occasionally the head of the column had to halt.

The sun sank, the western sky changed from gold to purple, and finally its rosy glow melted into grey. Night came on, but still the men pushed steadily ahead. By midnight they had been on the march some seven hours, and they had covered scarcely more than twenty miles. It was all-important to make use of the cool of the night, and after a brief halt the bugle sounded once more.

The men marched splendidly. They were as eager as their leaders to get to Cawnpore, for both the Madras Fusiliers and the 84th had comrades shut up in Sir Hugh Wheeler's entrenchment. Captain Harley and Philip Heron soon became chums. They discovered that they had mutual friends in England, and this was a pleasant link between them. They were trotting a little ahead of the men, when Harley suddenly exclaimed :

"Hallo ! What's that ?"

Something white was creeping along towards them, keeping well within the deep shadow of the long grass bordering the road on each side. The moon was shining brightly, and though the grass afforded splendid cover for sharpshooters, the brilliant light enabled them to see the slightest movement. Not a breath of air was stirring, and the feathery tops hung motionless in the heavy atmosphere. As they approached, a man stepped boldly from the shadow. He was in the ordinary native dress of Oudh, and was armed with a bow and arrow.

"I am your highness's humble servant," said the man with a low salaam. "I bring news from Cawnpore."

"Ah!" exclaimed Harley. "Are you sent by Sir Hugh Wheeler?"

"No, sahib."

The man hesitated, and fumbled with his waistband.

"Then you bring a letter?"

"I bring no letter, sahib."

"Then tell us your news," broke in Philip impatiently.

Heron could speak Hindustani, not fluently perhaps, but sufficiently accurate for ordinary conversation. Had the Crimean War not broken out, he would have been sent to India. To that end he had studied the language of the East at Addiscombe. He had also worked at it all day long during the voyage to Calcutta, and after landing had never lost an opportunity of talking to any of the natives he met.

"My news is bad—is terrible," said the man, with downcast eyes. "Your lordships will not believe me."

"Why the deuce don't you speak?" rapped out Harley.

"The garrison has surrendered, sahib."

"It's a lie. I know General Wheeler too well!" cried Harley.

"It is true. And it is not all the truth."

"What then?"

"Massacre—murder."

"My God!" exclaimed Heron. "The women—the children——"

"Massacred too, all but those mem-sahibs shut up by Azimoolah Khan."

The two listeners looked at each other in silent horror. An indescribable chill passed over Philip Heron, as though every drop of blood in his body had turned to ice. For a few moments the appalling news stunned his brain, paralysed his nerve, his very being. Harley was scarcely less affected, but the terror did not come home personally to him as it did to Philip Heron.

The Hindoo in his simple language told how the end had come. There was no prospect of relief, and General Wheeler, moved by the suffering of the women and the rapidly diminishing strength of the garrison, had surrendered, believing in the promise of Nana Sahib, that he and the remnant of his brave troops, and the women and children, should be allowed to go safely to Allahabad. Then followed the treachery of the Nana and his infamous adviser, Azimoolah. As the two men heard the ghastly story of the boats they ground their teeth, and clenched their fists till the nails were dug into the flesh. Before the native had finished, Major Renaud had joined the two men, and he was not less moved than they.

"Harley!" he exclaimed, "you must ride instantly to Allahabad with this terrible news. Heron will command the troopers meanwhile."

Harley would have much preferred to remain with the advancing column, but it was of the highest importance that Havelock should know what had happened as soon as possible, and he rode away.

The news from Cawnpore hastened the progress of the force, and the men did not halt until the morning was well advanced. The heat becoming very intense, they rested for three or four hours, and then pushed on by easy stages to Lohanga. They were then forty miles from Allahabad, and had thus come one-third of the distance to Cawnpore. At Lohanga, about midnight, Harley rode in with dispatches from Havelock. The instructions these dispatches brought were disappointing, though possibly wise. Renaud was ordered to stand fast at Lohanga.

Harley reported that there had been a difference of opinion between Neill and Havelock on the subject. Neill regarded the reports from Cawnpore as a device of the enemy, and with his usual energy and eagerness urged that Renaud should push forward. Havelock thought that in the event of the news being true, Renaud's small force would simply meet with disaster if it encountered the enemy, as most likely it would, in overwhelming strength. Neill was so sanguine that he was injudicious enough to telegraph to Sir Patrick Grant, the Commander-in-Chief, a remonstrance against the orders of his superior officer, and the causeless delay he considered they involved. And so it came about that the little army remained at Lohanga a couple of days, when further instructions came.

Sir Patrick Grant, it appeared, had replied to Neill's telegram that if the disastrous news from Cawnpore was credited, Renaud's force was to be halted until supported by Havelock's.

Renaud was nevertheless directed to move forward, and so he cautiously advanced to the vicinity of Kazan, about twenty miles short of Futtehpore, a little less than sixty miles distant from Cawnpore. At Kazan they waited impatiently for the coming of Havelock. Never had they felt so anxious, and all the rest were equally so. At last Philip Heron burst out :

"Major Renaud, this inaction is terrible. Let me ride ahead and see if the road to Cawnpore is open."

Renaud paused for a moment, and then gave his consent, but somewhat unwillingly.

"You had better take ten troopers with you," said he.

"I'd rather go unattended," returned Philip shortly. "I've not too much faith in men."

"Very well," said he, "do as you like, and good luck go with you !"

Phil Heron rode about ten miles without meeting a single soul. Even the two villages he passed through were deserted. The news of Neill's hangings and floggings at Benares had spread, and doubtless it was known that the British force was about to advance from Allahabad. The villagers, in their fear of reprisals for the butchery at Cawnpore, had taken flight.

The road was terribly parched and dusty. The rain was daily expected, but none had yet fallen. The sound of the horse's hoofs ploughing deep in the soft sand, was scarcely audible. On either side stretched vast, undulating plains, and in front was a range of low hills, apparently covered with short, scrubby trees. A trot of

half a mile brought Heron to the rising ground. A few yards farther and he had entered the gloom of the trees, which he found were taller than he had at first imagined them to be.

Philip allowed his horse to go at a walking pace, and the ground gradually rising, he arrived at the crown of the hill, and there saw through the openings between the trees what appeared, in the uncertain light of the moon, to be a large army encamped on the plain below. Beyond, some five miles away, was the town of Futteh-pore. Heron reined in his horse. To go farther would be foolhardy, for he would simply come out into the open, a conspicuous object easily to be seen by the most careless of sentries.

"Havelock was right," he thought. "There are three thousand men at least down there. Renaud's four hundred, with only one hundred British redcoats among the lot, would be eaten up."

Philip sat quietly estimating the extent and nature of the force—he could see a battery of artillery quite plainly through his field-glass—and then decided to return. He had scarcely wheeled round when the jangling of accoutrements and the sound of mocking laughter burst upon his ear. That mocking laughter did not come from English throats. The voices became louder. He could distinguish words. The men were talking in ribald fashion of the massacre in the boats, of the poor captive British ladies. The Englishman's blood boiled. He had no thought of escape. The only sensation he was conscious of was the desire to cut, slash—to kill.

Tramp, tramp, jingle, jingle, more coarse language and offensive chuckles. At last they appeared—half a dozen native cavalry, fully armed. Seeing a British officer sitting there so motionless, they were at first horribly frightened. They reined up their steeds in a clatter and confusion. Philip did not give them time to recover. A flash, a report, and the foremost man fell headlong from his saddle. The pistol shot seemed to bring the others to their senses. It convinced them he was not a spectre. They came on helter-skelter. Again a barrel of his revolver was emptied, but, unluckily, Heron's horse was not well used to the sound of firearms. He had probably missed his mark, for the men kept their seats.

Heron had but time to fire a third shot—with success, luckily—when they were upon him—four sowars, with their swords flashing in the moonlight. In a second Philip's blade was out. He felt as though he could sweep it through the bodies of the miscreants at a blow. But he attempted nothing of the kind. Slashing was all very well under certain circumstances, but not now. It took too much time. He used the thrust.

The first sowar made the mistake Heron avoided. He raised his sword for a sweeping cut. Before it had descended a quarter of the curve necessary, the point of the Englishman's blade pierced his windpipe. It was a lucky stroke. Had Heron ran him through the body he might not have been able to withdraw his sword in time for the attack of the second man, who was

rushing upon him with a direct stab. As it was, the scwar's thrust was parried, and before he could recover or guard, he was a dead man.

The victory was won, for the remaining two did not stay to fight. They wheeled round and galloped away their hardest. Heron galloped too, in the opposite direction ; he saw the pistol shots had aroused the camp, and he was now anxious to rejoin Renaud and tell him the news.

The moon was chining brightly when he arrived about half a mile from the camp. Surely he could hear the wild, warlike tones of the Highland pipes ! He reined in his horse, the better to listen. His ear had not deceived him ; and mingled with the shrill note of the pipes came the hearty, soul-stirring cheers of British soldiers. There could be but one explanation. Havelock with the Ross-shire Buffs and the 64th had arrived.

Heron put his jaded steed to the gallop, was soon at the camp, and was at once spotted by his old comrade Macintyre, but had scarcely time to say a word when he caught sight of Havelock, and quickly reported to the General the position of the enemy. Havelock's face brightened.

"I could wish they were nearer," said he with a smile.

Havelock had already been informed by means of his spies that a body of mutineers from Cawnpore was advancing—3,000 strong in regular sepoy, amply provided with artillery, and swollen by hundreds of irregular cavalry. He felt that Renaud's position was precarious ; but

to order him to fall back would have been fatal, so he determined to overtake him by a forced march.

Fatigued as the men were, there was little time for rest ; and after a brief halt the night march was resumed, Renaud's force in the place of honour. At seven o'clock the following morning the tired men reached the camping ground of Belinda, four miles from Futtehpore. Here it was that Philip Heron had seen the mutineers drawn up, but not a vestige of them was now visible, his encounter with the sowars had no doubt altered their plans.

The soldiers, half dead with fatigue, were not sorry to rest and breakfast. The cooks of the various messes were already active, and Havelock was sitting under a tree, when suddenly a round shot came rolling along within half a dozen yards of him. The only damage it did was to smash one of the camp kettles of the 64th.

In an instant the whole camp was alive, and the bugle was sounding the "assembly." Colonel Tytler, who had gone on a reconnaissance, was then seen galloping back with his volunteer cavalry, followed by a swarm of native horsemen, who no sooner saw they were rushing upon Havelock's full force than they wheeled round and disappeared.

What happened next can be quickly told. The Nana's army retreated to Futtehpore ; the town was taken at the bayonet's point ; Colonel Maude's artillery paralysed the sepoy's, and the slaughter was great. It was Havelock's first victory, to

be followed by the encounter at Aong, where the gallant Renaud fought his last fight; the deadly struggle at the half-broken bridge over the Pandoo-Nuddee, and the terrific onslaught, against a withering fire, of the village beyond, where the Highlanders and the 64th, forgetting their exhaustion, rivalled each other in the fury of their attack.

The day seemingly was won, though at terrible cost, when suddenly the force in advance came upon the main body of the sepoy army, in the middle of which, in a richly ornamented howdah, on the back of an elephant, was Nana Sahib himself!

Havelock was without his artillery, his men were spent, but he did not waver. The scene was one never to be forgotten. The General wheeled round his pony—his horse had been shot under him—and facing his men he cried in the steady, sonorous voice which his soldiers knew so well:

“The longer you look at it now the less you will like it. Rise up. The brigade will advance, left battalion leading.”

The magic of Havelock's personality told. A mad, irresistible rush, and the vast host of mutineers losing heart gave way before the avenging little army, whose courage nothing could daunt. Then up came Maude with his guns, and all was over.

Cawnpore was won!

A much-needed bivouac and the next morning Havelock entered the city. Not a sepoy was to be seen. Where were the poor women and

children? Three men of the 78th, Macintyre among them, with Heron, were the first to search. Passing the entrance of a compound near the old Cawnpore Hotel some indefinable feeling made them pause. It was as if a restraining hand had been laid upon them.

A native was hovering about the entrance, horror written upon his dusky face. When the four soldiers approached he seemed inclined to fly. Indeed, he did run a few paces, but he, too, was under the mysterious influence which had affected the searchers. He came back, and with a whispered "Sahib!" pointed within.

Inside the compound was a low, flat-roofed bungalow. The Highlander in advance entered, and almost immediately reappeared, his once ruddy face ashen, his hands thrown up convulsively, his whole frame in a tremor. He was paralysed with horror. Vainly he strove to speak. Not a sound came from his white lips.

The end of their quest had come. They had reached the House of Massacre!

CHAPTER XXIV

VENGEANCE IS MINE !

THE discovery of that morning, the thoughts of that horrible massacre and the awful well, hovered over every one like a thick, impenetrable mist. Then came the blankness, the reaction after the excitement and deadly strain of the past three days, and worse than all, the sickening feeling that the labour, the suffering, the loss of life, had been in vain !

Depression gave place to devilment. The men broke bounds, and, finding quantities of spirits in many of the houses, were for the time being converted into raging demons. Here had come in the fiendish cunning of Azimoolah Khan. The wretch knew human nature well, and he was pretty certain what would happen when our men entered the city, if he could put the means in their way. So before leaving Cawnpore he took care to plant in dozens of the deserted houses stores of rum and other spirits, and the soldiers swallowed the vile stuff without ceasing.

Meanwhile, Philip Heron searched high and low throughout Cawnpore. He had not the shadow of a hope that either Dick or Ruth was

alive; but to be inactive was torture, and on, on, he went, hour after hour.

Now and again he picked up scraps of the pitiful story, and among other things, learned of the Nana's palace at Bithoor. Attaching himself to Barrow's horse, which towards evening set out for Bithoor, Heron proceeded thither.

An hour's ride brought them within sight of the building, and Heron rode ahead to reconnoitre. So far as he could tell, no preparations had been made for defence. On came the little troop of horsemen, not knowing whether from some hidden battery shot and grape would be suddenly poured upon them. But all was silent. Barrow and Heron entered the palace, and were met by a native, who fell on his face before them. This man was Narrain Rao, whose father had been in the service of the old Bajee Rao, whose adopted son was Nana Sahib.

"Where's your villainous master?" demanded Heron, his revolver a couple of inches from the trembling man's head.

"Fled, my lords, to Delhi or Lucknow. Your servant does not know which. It is the truth he is telling your lordships."

Leaving Barrow to deal with the man, Heron stepped to one of the windows and saw that earthworks had been thrown up near the house, and guns mounted. "You had prepared us a welcome, I see," said he, pointing to the guns.

"Ah, Sahib, I had to do that to satisfy the Nana," said the man through his chattering teeth.

Whether this was the truth is difficult to say.

Certain it is that Narrain Rao was of great assistance to General Neill when the latter arrived at Cawnpore a few days later, and it was said he was on bad terms with the Nana. Probably he saw it was to his advantage to remain in the palace, and pretend to be friendly towards the British, for he took care to appropriate as many valuables as he could lay his hands upon.

While Barrow was talking with Narrain Rao, a tremendous shouting outside announced the arrival of a detachment of Madras "Lambs" and Sikhs. When it was discovered there was no fighting to be done, the soldiers scattered themselves over the building to loot, riot, smash, and finally to burn.

Barrow disappeared to restore order if possible, but his endeavours were of little avail. The men were raging through the luxurious rooms like maniacs, the British soldiers, with their muskets clubbed, smashing everything within reach, and the Sikhs busily looting. Not a sepoy or servant was to be seen. Narrain Rao had vanished. Had he remained, he would have received but short shrift.

His quest unsatisfied, Philip Heron hurried from room to room. The interior of the palace was like a maze, with its multitudinous apartments, its bewildering corridors, passages, ante-chambers and staircases, arranged without order or convenience.

By this time the sunset was well-nigh over, and the light was dim, yet Philip had not explored all the rooms. He had found himself in an

apartment to which apparently there was but one door. He was about to return to the passage from which he had entered the room, when amid the distant yells of the infuriated soldiery he fancied he heard a voice quite near. He listened breathlessly. The sound appeared to come from a side of the room fitted with panels, richly inlaid with sweet-scented woods of varied hues. He crept close and listened. The words were in Hindustani, but their meaning was plain to the listener.

"You will never leave this place alive," the voice was saying—whether a man or woman was speaking, Philip could not determine—"Your countrymen have reached the Nana's palace. They will not find the Nana, but they *may* find you—dead! Do you understand?"

There was no answer. The voice went on:

"You could have been killed like the rest, but I wanted to see you die. I hate you, because I hated the young *hoozur* (English officer) who loved you, and who scorned *my* love. Hooseinee Khanum never forgets—never forgives. It was I who fired at him when he was with you. I would have had him drop dead at your feet."

Again there was a pause.

"Azimoolah would have made you his slave, but your beauty was gone. He cared no more for you when your cheeks were white and wasted and your eyes were dull. I begged *you*—the *baba logue*—from him. 'Do what you like with her,' he said. 'I want to see her die,' I told him. Azimoolah laughed."

Then the other—the victim, the rival spoke.

"Why do you not kill me then? I don't want to live. Kill me quickly. Oh! Dick, Dick, why did I not die with you!"

Philip Heron started. The lament was uttered in English! The next moment he hurled himself against the panelled wall. The woodwork was but frail, and gave way with a crash and a splintering.

The last rays of the setting sun shone full on the lancet-shaped window, and suffused the room with a crimson light. A girl was tied hand and foot to a pillar in the centre supporting the vaulted roof. At the end of the room near the window crouched a woman, whose dusky face, with its repulsive, cruel lips, was distorted with rage, hatred, and jealousy. She was feeling for the catch of the window to escape from the vengeance which she knew was pursuing her.

Heron wasted no time on the woman; he dashed to the girl, and in a trice cut her bonds with his sword. At the same moment the window was thrown open and Hooseinee Khanum, climbing upon the sill, was lowering herself to a ledge beneath, along which she intended to crawl. Then came a terrific explosion, a snake-like tongue of flame darted past the window, illuminating the room for a second, and was followed by dense clouds of acrid, suffocating smoke. There were heard yells, shouts of derisive triumph, mingled with cheers from a score of British throats. The palace had been set on fire!

Suddenly the cheers ceased as though cut by a knife. Hooseinee Khanum, the Jezebel of the

House of Massacre—had fallen headlong from the ledge on which she had taken refuge, and was dashed upon the pavement below. The infamous woman had met the fate of her prototype !

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Hooseinee Khanum's thirst for revenge had recoiled upon itself. But for this Ruth must have shared the fate of the rest, and to find herself in the arms of the man whom she secretly loved, whom she had never forgotten, but whom she had never thought to have seen again, was like a glimpse of heaven. Hooseinee spoke with jealous spite when she said Ruth's beauty was gone. True, her cheeks were thin and wan, her form wasted, but her eyes were more lustrous than ever. They shone with the light of the courage and endurance which had never failed her throughout those never-to-be-forgotten horrors.

The first shot fired into the entrenchment was on June 6, the tragedy of the House of Massacre was enacted on July 15—some five weeks only ! To Ruth these weeks were so many years of intolerable torture. Strange would it have been if such a frightful strain upon her vitality had not left indelible traces behind.

The time came when all that Ruth had gone through seemed vague, shadowy, unreal, for memories of misery are fleeting ; those of happiness enduring. Only one link with terrible Cawnpore remained unbroken—her remembrance of poor Dick ; and for her husband to know that his brother had loved her, made her more precious

in his sight. Many a time in the peace and quietude of their English home, when the prattle of their children had ceased, and the house was still, did they wander hand in hand in their pretty garden by the river, while the sun went down and the shadows lengthened, and talk in low voices of Dick. Only those who have suffered and have made sacrifices know the nobility, the undying romance of pure love ; and though it would have sounded selfish to have said in so many words that for them Dick had not died in vain, yet both felt it was the truth. Even death has its compensations.

THE END

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